

the magazine for
the contemporary teacher



TEACHER PLUS

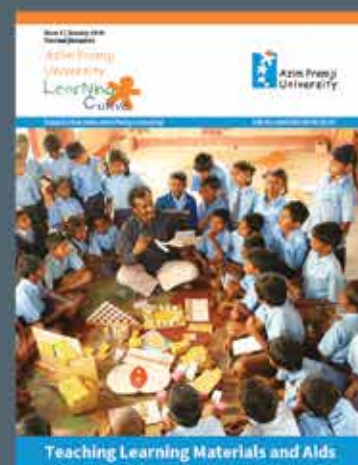
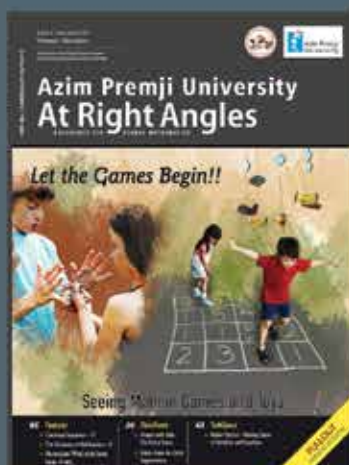
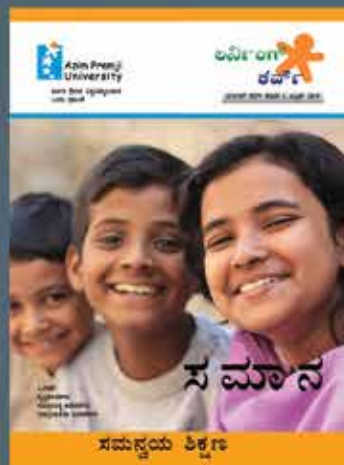
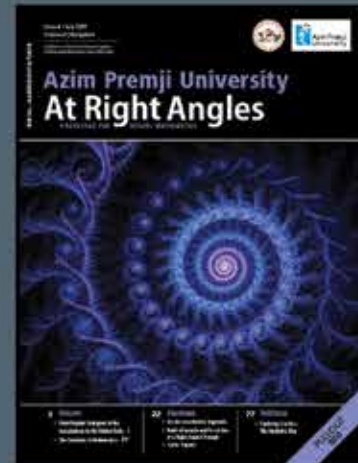
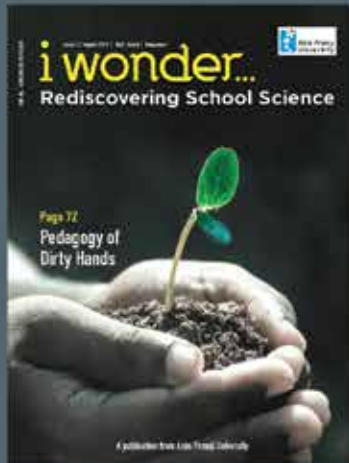
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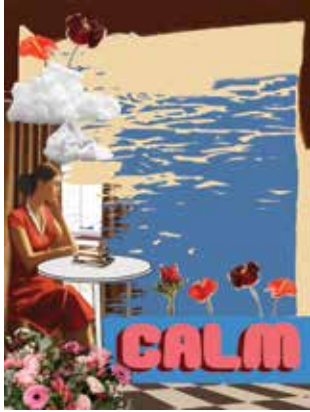


CALM

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Finding your peace



I won't deny it; the past month has been a tough one for those engaged with struggles over inequality and social justice. You might ask, which month – or week or day – is not? That is true, but some months – days, weeks, hours – are harder than others. Teachers may not been

seen as social justice warriors, but there's no denying that our classrooms are places where we can glimpse the potential and possibility for social change, one individual at a time. Which is why – as the theme of this issue suggests – we need to find ways of finding and keeping our inner strength, ways of staying centered and calm even when the world around us seems to be falling apart.

If you pay any attention to the news, you would have seen the headlines screaming out at you about the horrific events involving a medical professional in Kolkata, or the equally horrible fate of a young woman outside Mumbai, or again, a teenager in Muzaffarpur, Bihar. Some of you may have joined protests or silently shed a tear, thinking that the stories never seem to end. Ace wrestler Vinesh Phogat remarked that while such gruesome incidents make the headlines, the struggle against gender based violence is an everyday fact in almost every sphere of activity. And, one might add, in almost every space, whether private or public, domestic or professional. The Justice Hema Committee report, made public in late July, which deals with gender-based exploitation in the Malayalam film industry, lists the persistent practices that render women vulnerable. It's been called Kerala cinema's "Me Too Moment", leading us to wonder how many more industries and sectors will reveal their own sordid stories. The

teaching community, and the education sector more broadly, are not exempt, and issues of gender based exploitation can affect those who deliver education, manage institutions, and, most crucially, those who enter these spaces to learn.

In *Teacher Plus* we do not often talk about such issues, except in the context of how we might make our classrooms more gender equitable, or how we can sensitize children in a way that makes them less likely to engage in gender-discriminatory behaviours. We have in the past delved deeply into matters of sexuality and sex education, carrying more than one series of articles that give teachers ideas about how to deal with these sensitive topics in class. But clearly what we are doing in our classrooms and in our homes is not enough to make this culture change. We still have to worry about our girls (and boys), and we still have to teach them ways of protecting themselves from a society that refuses to shift its ways of seeing and thinking.

But we must go on. And we must keep trying. And each time a young face looks at you with comprehension, or whose eyes light up with interest, or who sees the connections you have attempted to show, you know it's all worth it. The ability to "keep on keeping on" comes from a space inside you fed by your own interests and passions, but it is also fed by these signs that tell you that what you're doing touches lives. And maybe, can change things.

As for me, where do I go to find that energy, or to rest my mind and spirit when faced with the tragedies of the world, large and small? I fall into the comfort of a novel, to discover other worlds of possibility, and I cushion myself with music and poetry. When it's not raining, and there's a weekend with hours to spare, I take a walk in whatever piece of greenery I can find. Or I sit doing nothing, holding a cup of hot filter coffee.

Usha Raman

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Keep calm and ...

Keep calm and stay positive

Anju Dhawan

Keep calm and stay healthy

*Dr. Anamika Sharma and
Dr. L. Ravithej Singh*

Keep calm and click refresh

Anuja Venkatraman

Keep calm and dance

Fareen Wahid

One child at a time

Lakshmi Mitter

Keep calm and remember the little things

Ashwini Subodh Pathak

Keep calm and seed the future

Bincy Mary George

Keep calm and embrace self-care

Kanwal Singh

Keep calm and create curiosity

Chatura Rao

Keep calm and freeze

Sinny Mole

Keep calm and stride on

Latha Vydianathan

Keep calm and bloom

Dharti Vaibhav

If you can't go outside, go inside

Bhumi Sharma

Mindful moments for a calm life

Anshika Bedi

World peace follows inner peace

Dr. Jerry Jean

Keep calm and dream big

Yukti Lao

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Staying calm in an unquiet world

Anindita Bhattacharya 

Illustration: Niveditha Narendran

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"Within you, there is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself."

– **Hermann Hesse**

In a turbulent, chaotic world, where everything around us seems to be swirling, keeping calm is such a challenge. While we are all struggling with feelings of being overwhelmed either by the events around the world, or our personal lives, a fundamental understanding of neuroscience can help us calm down and feel more in control.

The seat of all our emotions lies in a tiny almond-shaped organ inside our brain called the '**amygdala**'. This is a powerful organ responsible for almost all the important functions of daily life, like remembering things, making decisions, and most importantly, expressing anger, sadness, anxiety, and fear, among other emotions. The amygdala, in response to threat, helps us release stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline to gear up our body for "fight or flight". Be it a real threat or a perceived threat, our body goes into a state of preparedness, where our breath becomes shallow, the heart pumps blood faster, all the blood from the palms goes towards the larger muscle groups, our digestion slows down, and the whole body gears up to either freeze, run away from the threat, or fight back for survival. Imagine a scenario where you have to make a presentation in class, or in front of important stakeholders, and your heart starts thumping so loudly that you can almost envision others in the room hearing your panic.

This is an evolutionary response, helping all of us to survive. But in the modern world when threats are becoming vaguer and more psychological in nature, we need various other ways to calm our mind.

Along with the amygdala, there are also various neurotransmitters in our brain which contribute to a sense of happiness, positivity, and pleasure. These are also popularly called as the 'Happy Hormones'¹:

Dopamine is an important component of our brain's reward system; it's associated with feelings of pleasure, learning, and memory. This is also called the 'feel-good' hormone. Imagine it getting released every time you see a notification on your Instagram post and make you feel rewarded.

Serotonin plays a pivotal role in regulating mood, sleep, appetite, memory, and learning ability.

The 'love hormone' or **oxytocin** is essential for enhancing human relationships, childbirth, breastfeeding, and the bond we feel with our little ones. It contributes to our feelings of trust and empathy. It is mostly released through physical touch and intimacy.

Endorphins are our natural pain relievers; they are released when we exercise, eat, or are physically intimate with our partners.

Fortunately, there are simple tools and strategies that can help us regain our sense of calm and control. Given below are some very straightforward ways for you to reclaim tranquillity in your everyday life:

Prioritize self-care

- **Exercise regularly** for multiple physical and psychological benefits. Engaging in a physical activity consistently helps in the release of dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins (commonly associated with 'runner's high'). A research study on medical students in 2017² also highlighted how exercising with people close to us can provide significantly more benefits than exercising solo. Go ahead and schedule at least 30 minutes of activity with a friend, and if possible, at least some kind of aerobic exercises (for e.g., jump ropes, squats, lunges, push-ups, running, jogging, swimming, or cycling) for a greater release of endorphins³.
- **Get some quality sleep:** Sleep disturbances can cause disbalance in dopamine⁴, which in turn can affect your mood. It's important to prioritize sleep and get at least 7-8 hours of shut eye⁵. You can follow simple sleep hygiene techniques for this, like having a fixed timing for going to bed and waking up, avoiding caffeine after 6 pm, creating a quiet and restful sleep environment, following a simple ritual (e.g., skin care routine, drinking milk, or changing into night clothes, reading, reducing gadget use) to cue the brain to slow down for the night.
- **Engage in a hobby:** Cooking and enjoying a sumptuous meal with loved ones can go a long way in releasing the major happy hormones. The simple joy of having a delicious meal can lead to the release of both dopamine and endorphins, enjoying it with a loved one can further help the release of oxytocin. The kind of food you are having can also help release neurotransmitters. Spicy food can help release endorphins, while

foods high in tryptophan help release serotonin, and yogurt, beans, eggs, and almonds help in the release of dopamine^{6,7,8}.

- **Engage in a musical experience:** Either listen to or create music to give your happy hormones a boost. Listening to soothing music can help in the release of serotonin; instrumental music especially leads to an increase in dopamine⁹. A study in 2016 found that performing music, especially in a large group, leads to an increase in endorphin levels¹⁰.

Meditate

It has been found that regular meditators have an increase in their dopamine production¹¹. A simple meditative practice need not be about keeping still but can look like this:

Find a comfortable and quiet place, try to relax into a sitting, lying, or standing posture, whatever works for you, just notice the thoughts – positive or negative – coming and going, try not to judge, or resist them. Simply acknowledge them and note them as mental events. You can start by doing a five-minute routine and gradually increase the time.

Spend more time with friends, family, and pets

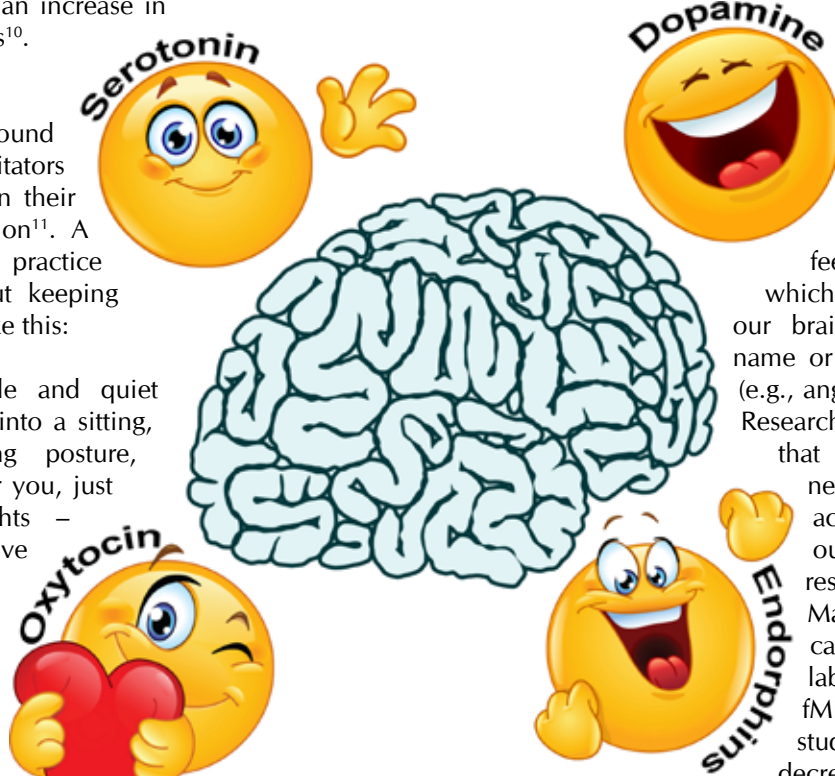
Spend time with your furry friends. Research studies¹² indicate that dog owners can enhance their dopamine and lower their cortisol by interacting with their dogs. Oxytocin is also known as the 'love hormone'; spending time with loved ones, hugging, or physical touch contributes to its production and to feeling happy and blissful. It has also been found that laughing with friends and family can boost dopamine and endorphins; it also reduces anxiety and stress¹³.

Get more sun

Getting more exposure to sunlight has been found to enhance serotonin levels as well¹⁵. Spend time outdoors when you are free (e.g., hiking, playing,

walking, etc.) to get more exposure to UV radiation, which enhances serotonin. Remember to use a sunscreen and not to get overexposed as that could lead to skin cancer.

Apart from enhancing our happy hormones, there are also simple steps to calm down our sympathetic nervous system, especially when feeling extremely vulnerable and stressed. These simple steps help us break the feedback loop of stress and bring us back in control of our situation.



Step 1: Affect labelling:

A simple yet effective technique to disrupt the feedback loop of stress, which is running between our brain and body is to name or label our emotions (e.g., anger, fear, or anxiety). Research studies have shown that articulating our negative emotions can actually help minimize our physiological response. Professor Matthew Lieberman calls this "affect labelling", which, his fMRI (functional MRI) studies show, lead to a decrease in brain activity in the amygdala, which

further helps the frontal lobe (reasoning and thinking centre) to take back control and try to solve the problem¹⁴.

Step 2: Breath control: The other easy strategy is to gradually slow down our breathing by making our exhales longer than the inhales. This can be done by trying to double the time we spend on exhalation compared to inhalation (for e.g., counting till 4 to breath in and till 8 to breath out through the mouth). The longer time taken to exhale sends a message to our vagus nerve to turn up the parasympathetic nervous system and calm the sympathetic nervous system. Dr. Esther Sternberg, research director at the Arizona Centre for Integrative Medicine, says, "Deep breathing turns on the vagus nerve enough that it acts as a brake on the stress response...which in turn powers up the parasympathetic nervous system."

Step 3: Relabelling the emotion: Once the feedback loop is interrupted, the final step is to rewire the brain into rethinking about the emotional stimuli causing the initial panic. This process involves re-labelling the emotions as something non-threatening than negative (for e.g., fear as anticipation or worry as concern). The attempt is to convince the amygdala that the stimuli does not need a stress response but is rather something one can control. Slowing down the breath along with re-labelling helps the brain regain its sense of calm.

These steps may seem very easy, but they need to be practiced consistently and can help in contributing profoundly to our wellbeing in the long run. A basic understanding of neuroscience and practising all these simple techniques can change the way we respond to negative circumstances and stressful events. By committing to these straightforward actions regularly, you can build your resilience and enhance your composure even in the most challenging situations.

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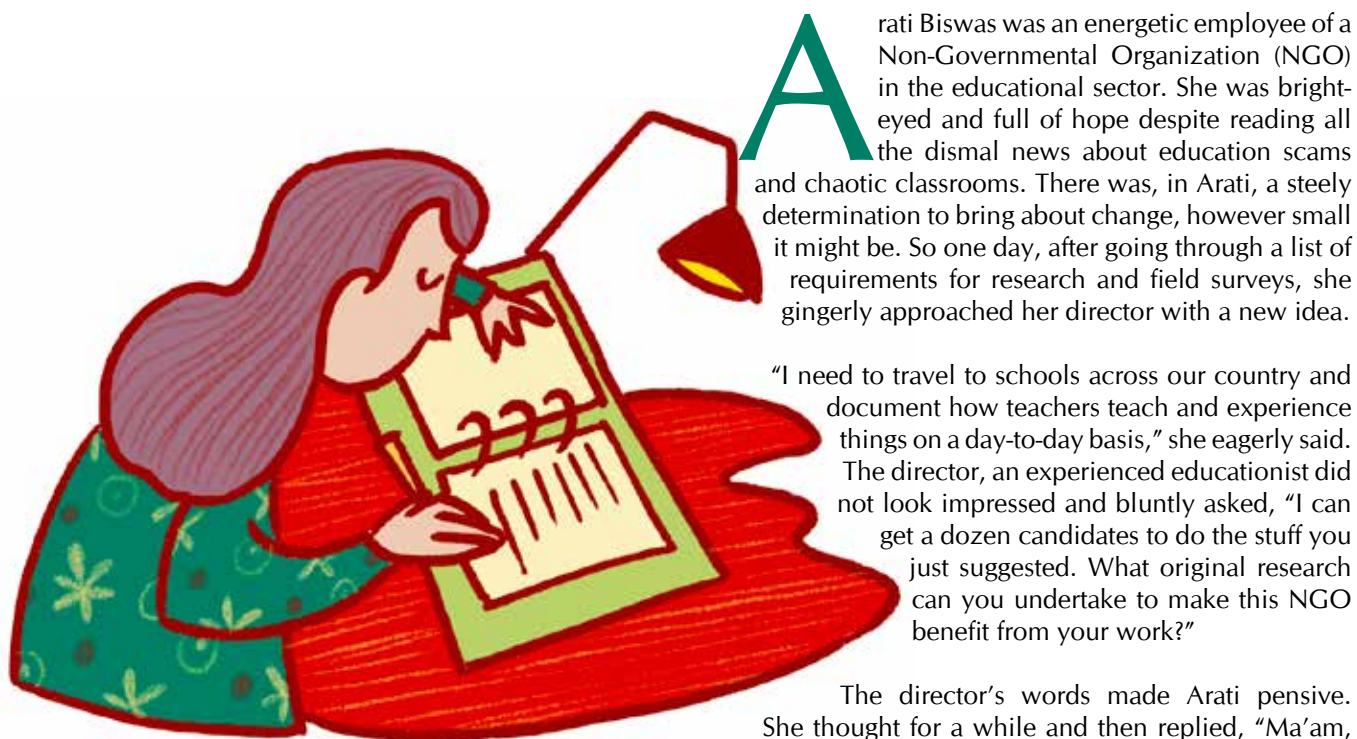


The calmness quotient

Nabanita Deshmukh ✍️

'In schools with a history of chaos, the teacher who can keep the classroom calm becomes virtually indispensable.'

– Jonathan Kozol



Illustrations: Soumya Menon

Arati Biswas was an energetic employee of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in the educational sector. She was bright-eyed and full of hope despite reading all the dismal news about education scams and chaotic classrooms. There was, in Arati, a steely determination to bring about change, however small it might be. So one day, after going through a list of requirements for research and field surveys, she gingerly approached her director with a new idea.

"I need to travel to schools across our country and document how teachers teach and experience things on a day-to-day basis," she eagerly said. The director, an experienced educationist did not look impressed and bluntly asked, "I can get a dozen candidates to do the stuff you just suggested. What original research can you undertake to make this NGO benefit from your work?"

The director's words made Arati pensive. She thought for a while and then replied, "Ma'am, I become agitated when I have a presentation to make. In fact, every time there was an exam, I almost collapsed with nervousness. Perhaps I could study how teachers in urban and rural schools cope with fear and what they do to calm themselves down? I could then provide effective tools to help them cope with challenges and thereby enhance teacher satisfaction and wellbeing."

A faint smile played upon the director's lips and she chuckled, "Now that's a much better proposition, Arati. Calmness and wellbeing are the new mantras of productive

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workers in their quest for work-life balance. Go ahead then! Do your research on what teachers do to find peace in stressful situations, but don't forget to calm yourself down before starting!"

And thus began for Arati a journey of learning and self-exploration that took her across different regions of India.

Rural Odisha

The first village school Arati visited was in Odisha's Bolangir district. A thatched hut was the only classroom available and it was packed with students. There was no demarcation of levels, everyone studied together. There was only one teacher to manage the classes and her name was Gangamani Dei.

The noise made by the students in the classroom was deafening and it reached such a crescendo that the poor teacher got a sore throat just by shouting "keep quiet!" Yet...there was no impact. The students continued to shout and some of them even ran out of the hut to play. Arati was about to intervene when something surprising happened! Gangamani, who must have been in her late forties, took a few deep breaths. She then opened her bag, took out her mobile phone and a Bluetooth speaker, clicked on a link and lo! An interesting story in Odia with soothing music in the background wafted through the speaker! The children instantly became silent and listened to the tale in rapt attention.



Arati was dumbfounded. Wow! What an impact an audio story had on a motley group of children! That evening she made copious notes in her diary about her classroom observations and wrote, 'When I asked Gangamani what made her think of audio stories she just smiled and said, "Audio resources, whether they be, stories, songs, or music, have a calming effect on children and also on teachers. I try and listen to soothing music before coming to school and I feel so peaceful. All it takes to quieten down is a mobile phone and a Bluetooth speaker that are easily available in the market."'

Kolkata diaries

In Kolkata, a few weeks later, Arati visited a government-aided school in Manicktola. There, unlike Gangamani's hut, were 10 classrooms made of brick and cement, but the number of students was low. Each classroom had 15 students and some had only 8.

The teachers, however, looked stressed. They used batons to discipline the students and many children were sent out to stand in the sun as punishment. Arati entered the first classroom and met the math teacher there. His name was Prodeep Sen and he was just 25 years old.

"I'm not from here," sulked Prodeep. "My family lives in Midnapur." The teacher then went on to haltingly explain how difficult it was for him to adjust to city life and how he missed home. He was particularly annoyed with his students who paid scant attention to what he was saying or teaching in class. Arati, who was a Bengali herself realized that Prodeep could not express himself well in English or in Bangla, his mother tongue. He often stuttered and repeated himself, hesitated and paused for a long time in between sentences and was unable to convey messages clearly.

Fortunately, the headmaster of the school was a compassionate man and he spent a lot of time with Prodeep to help him develop good communication skills. A few months later, Arati was in for a surprise! She got to know that Prodeep now enjoyed taking classes. His students were paying attention to what he was teaching and most importantly, the 25-year-old was finally at peace.

"Communication is the salt of life," Arati heard the headmaster say several times. "Most teachers blame students for being non-responsive, but actually it is they who are bad communicators. Good communication makes a person happier and more in control of his emotions."

The Assamese experience

Arati soon travelled north and visited a private school in Tinsukia, an important town in Upper Assam. She saw teachers there, a dozen of them always in a state of frenzy and anger. Their emotions arose not while they interacted with students, but when they could not get along with one another and this happened very often. Constant bickering and disagreements created a disagreeable atmosphere in the staffroom, which was beginning to affect their classroom teaching.

How to solve this nagging problem? The principal came up with a creative solution. Every Saturday, he held workshops on cooperation and peer work, where teachers worked in groups on small projects. Documentaries on teachers working in harmony with each other were also screened. Sometimes, an exposure visit was arranged where teachers visited a sister school known for its collaboration between teachers.

Arati realized that a good rapport between teachers fosters stronger bonds and develops harmony and empathy. Teachers tend to be happier and more at peace when they get the support and encouragement of their peers.

Coimbatore jottings

In Coimbatore, a sprawling city on the foothills of the Western Ghats, 70 teachers attended a workshop on 'Reflective Teaching Practices'. Arati found herself in



the crowd after taking permission from the headmistress to attend the workshop. The topic was completely new for Arati, but even more surprising were the reactions of teachers about their own competencies. Most of them found nothing wrong in the way they taught and it was always the fault of the students if they did not fare well in the exams. No wonder most of them looked distraught and agitated.

"My students are so dumb and distracted," complained a participant.

"I put so much effort into my teaching but these awful students are incapable of understanding what I teach," ranted her friend.

The complaints against the students piled up and would have continued to grow had the resource person, an experienced teacher herself, not demonstrated strategies of introspection and self-awareness and then everything changed! Teachers began to look deeply into how they taught or behaved and many of them decided to try new methods to make students more responsive and participate in class discussions and activities.

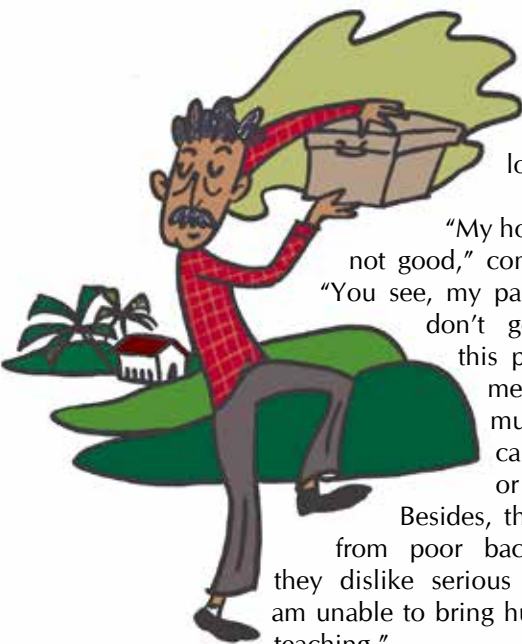
Arati observed how the behaviour of certain teachers changed during the workshop and this brought about changes in her own attitude too.

"Reflection and introspection are such important traits to develop not only in teachers but in other human beings as well," wrote Arati in her diary that night. "Reflection, if practiced regularly, encourages personal growth and makes one intensely aware of one's thoughts and feelings thereby making a person more in control of his or her own self."

The Kerala chapter

Monsoon had just set over the Malabar Coast when Arati entered God's Own Country – Kerala. The landscape was lush and Arati enjoyed her bus ride from Kochi to Munnar, a scenic district in the south western part of the state. The school she visited was situated in the midst of a tea garden and the students were primarily the children of plantation workers. The surrounding was breathtaking with miles and miles of green tea shrubs dotting the hills, but the teachers in the school looked glum, especially a middle-aged man called Kumar.

Kumar's demeanour was melancholic and his lack of humour affected his rapport with the students. Arati spent some time observing Kumar's classes and then



mustered the courage to ask him why he looked so glum.

"My home situation is not good," confessed Kumar. "You see, my parents and wife don't get along and this problem makes me anxious, so much so that I cannot even joke or laugh in class. Besides, the children are from poor backgrounds and they dislike serious classes, but I am unable to bring humour into my teaching."

Arati, who herself had experienced panic attacks in the past, felt the need to share some of her thoughts with Kumar.

"I know how sad you feel, sir," she told the teacher, "but it's unfair to the students if you cannot teach them well by being despondent. Try to compartmentalize your distress and put it in a box so that it does not affect other aspects of your life and work. It's not an easy task but with will power and practice, you can succeed."

Kumar surprisingly appreciated Arati's advice and regularly practised 'compartmentalizing' his emotions and within a few weeks, he felt calmer and his teaching became fun and interactive.

"I kept visualizing a large iron box, into which I put all my worries. Only when I felt like revisiting them, did I open the box, if not it was always tightly shut," he told his colleagues when he recently received the 'Best Teacher's Award' from his headmaster. Arati was present during the ceremony and she was pleased to see Kumar's transformation. He looked happier and his dark moods had vanished. Arati would have loved to observe Kumar's classes but it was now time for her to get back and she was keen to share her findings with her colleagues back home.

Back to base

"So, what are the important lessons in calmness you learned while observing teachers?" asked the director, happy to see Arati back after a long absence.

The young woman smiled.

"There is no one-fix magical formula for gaining calmness while teaching. In fact, there are several reasons why teachers feel restless and distraught," said Arati, "and some of those reasons are:

- A lack of knowledge about classroom management.
- A paucity of creative resources for teaching.
- An issue with colleagues.
- Faulty communication skills.
- A lack of introspection and reflection.
- Inability to compartmentalize personal problems."

Arati presented her findings without feeling anxious. In fact, her presentation was lucid and precise. There was no hesitation, pauses, or stuttering in her speech.

"Bravo!" said the director and then inquisitively asked, "Your presentation was useful Arati, but tell us how you became such a calm communicator?"

The young woman let out a sigh. "I guess that happened because of the teachers I met. Their experiences and the advice of mentors such as headmasters and resource persons also provided me with valuable tools to cope with discordant situations and become calmer."

"And what about the change you had envisaged? Do you think your work could bring about a shift somewhere?" asked a colleague.

Arati shook her head, "I doubt whether my work will create any immediate change in schools," she remarked, "but the greatest change has actually happened in me. My attitude and reactions towards situations and people are now more mature and less judgemental."

"But what has individual change got to do with a larger group of teachers?" persisted the colleague.

Arati smiled. "I now believe that for any external change to last, individuals need to reflect on their shortcomings and start changing their attitude vis-a-vis people and their environment," she said, "It is only then that a group or community can progress holistically. Fortunately, I saw that happen to a few teachers. With regular practice and perseverance, they remained unruffled in chaotic classrooms and made calmness an essential part of their teaching. And who knows? Students may emulate their teachers and learn to be calm in the midst of confusion and change!"

Coaching children to be centered

Aruna Sankaranarayanan 

To be calm, composed, and centered is not a learning goal that is spelled out in most curricula. While a minority of schools in the country have socioemotional learning (SEL) programs and explicitly teach these skills, the emotional lives of students are largely ignored by most institutions. Only when a problem surfaces, a child may be sent to a counsellor. Given that effective learning cannot take place unless children are in an optimal emotional state, shouldn't schools address the affective dimension as well? Merely having a counsellor on the rolls to work with "problem students" doesn't mean that a school is addressing the emotional needs of all children. In fact, SEL needs to be given the same emphasis as we currently accord the 3 Rs.

In *Permission to Feel*, psychologist and author, Marc Brackett emphasizes that if we "learn to identify, express and harness our feelings," we can "create positive, satisfying lives." Just like physical health, our emotional wellbeing impacts all aspects of our being. Learning to deal with our feelings is essential so that they don't overwhelm us.

The term "emotional intelligence" was first coined by psychologists, Peter Salovey and Jack Meyer and was popularized by Daniel Goleman in his bestselling book by the same name. Two main facets of emotional intelligence are self-awareness and emotional regulation. To help children acquire these essential skills, Brackett has identified five steps that are neatly captured by the acronym RULER.

The first 'R' in RULER stands for Recognition. Being able to recognize emotions in ourselves and others is a foundational skill. Recognizing emotions in ourselves, let alone others, is not necessarily straightforward,

however. Our preconceptions and prejudices may colour how we view ourselves and others. Brackett describes one study where half the students were told that a speaker who would be coming was a warm person. The other half were led to believe that the speaker was cold. The latter group rated the person as being "more irritable" than the former. To complicate matters, our own emotions, in the moment, influence how we perceive situations. If we are angry, we're more likely to notice that others around us are peeved or cranky.

Brackett also mentions a study in which sixth-graders spent five days on a digital detox, without access to devices. This group performed better than their peers on a subsequent task that involved identifying emotions.

Most emotions, avers Brackett, may be parsed according to two dimensions of pleasantness and energy. Imagine a graph with pleasantness on one axis and energy on the other. A feeling like excitement will rank high on both aspects and occupy the upper and rightmost quadrant. In contrast, feeling hopeless which involves low ratings on both axes, will occupy the bottom and leftmost quadrant. While anger entails a high rating for energy but a low one for pleasantness, being calm involves the converse pattern.

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Illustration: Soumya Menon

So, the first step involves getting a visceral sense of how we or someone else might be feeling. Because of our mirror neurons, we also tend to pick up the emotions of those around us. But Brackett coaxes us not to overthink at this stage. Rather than zero in on the exact emotion, we may get a fuzzy idea of what the emotion feels like. Is it pleasant or unpleasant? Is it energizing or draining us?

The next step entails Understanding the emotion. When we ask ourselves, “why do you or I feel this way?” Pinpointing the root cause of an emotion is the main task of this step. Every day we encounter innumerable people and experiences that trigger thoughts and feelings in us. Typically, we judge them automatically and sometimes “even unconsciously,” notes Brackett. Our judgments then influence what emotions we feel. To become emotionally intelligent, we need to be able to step away from our own automatic evaluations and try to understand the context of a situation or a person in their entirety. Further, we need to be aware that both proximal and distal events can trigger emotions in us.

For example, your coordinator may have unfairly pulled you up in front of your students, belittling your authority. At home that evening, when you’re cooking dinner, you’re still bristling with humiliation. When your spouse doesn’t help with laying the table, you launch into a tirade. Your spouse looks at you in alarm, but fortunately doesn’t react. You take a deep breath and admit that you had a lousy day at work. According to Brackett, understanding an emotion involves “our storytelling ability, perspective taking skills, and pattern seeking,” to make sense of our feelings in varied situations.

And, argues Brackett, attention-seeking, rude, or recalcitrant behaviour in adults and especially in children, is a “signal for emotions.” We need to put aside our judgments of the behaviour if we want to read the emotions that it is expressing.

Next, we need to Label emotions as precisely as possible. In fact, the mere act of giving an emotion a name, “is itself a form of regulation.” When we label our emotions accurately, it helps us understand

our experiences. Further, labelling may solicit help if required. Knowing that a child is hurting inside makes us more empathetic.

Brackett states that children who are able to give a label to their feelings have more prosocial relationships than their peers who struggle to name them. Having a larger vocabulary of feeling words helps us better understand our inner lives, which we can then communicate effectively to others.

Besides labelling our own feelings, when appropriate, teachers can explicitly teach emotion words to children through literature and everyday happenings in school. When children describe personal events during circle time, teachers could help them identify and label their emotion as well. “How did you feel when you got a new puppy?” or “Do you think Cinderella was more frustrated, disappointed, or dejected that she could not go to the ball with her stepsisters?” Further, we may normalize the act of talking about feelings, both positive and negative. Based on children’s grades and developmental levels, teachers may introduce them to more nuanced vocabulary.

The next step is to create a classroom culture that validates Expression of emotions, provided it is done in an appropriate manner. For example, if Rohit hits Nisha for taking his eraser, we may say, “Rohit, it’s okay to get upset if someone takes your eraser without asking. However, we use words to show we are upset.” Further, Brackett avers that expression is usually a “co-skill” as it involves a back-and-forth exchange. When children feel listened to and heard, they are more likely to be centered.

The final step is Regulation. It refers to how we manage “our own emotional responses” and also entails whether we can engage in “co-regulation” with others. If a student is upset and we react in an angry tone, the student is less likely to calm down. However, if we respond in a firm but soothing voice, the student is more likely to regain their own composure.

Emotional regulation should not be confused with denying or purging negative emotions from your life. Rather, it involves feeling the entire panoply of human emotion but without letting our emotions overwhelm or control us. We can model and teach children various strategies so that their emotions don’t overpower them. These include mindful breathing and attention-diverting exercises. For example, if an entire class is disappointed that their excursion has been cancelled, instead of diving straight into the lesson, playing a fun game with them will help them realign themselves.

Further, when children are calmer, we can help them reframe their negative appraisal of a situation to a more neutral or salubrious one. “It is disappointing that we cannot go on the excursion tomorrow as heavy rain is predicted. Imagine if we had gone and got stuck in bad weather? We couldn’t have done any of the fun activities we planned. At least, this way, we are all safe and we can plan to have the excursion next week.”

Finally, Brackett coaxes us to practice the “Meta-Moment” with children, which essentially entails pausing before responding, especially when we are gripped by a strong emotion. While a pause may not sound like much, a few seconds’ delay can change an impulsive, knee-jerk reaction to a more controlled and composed response.

By weaving socioemotional learning into our curricula, we can indeed impart simple, proven and effective strategies to children to lead more calm and centered lives. Isn’t that a laudable learning outcome in and of itself?

Reference

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A cool me for a cool them

Sheela Ramakrishnan ✍️

Several incidents came to mind while I was thinking about a disruptive classroom and the demands on an educator to handle such situations efficiently.

The first was an image of me as a grade 7 student (several decades ago)! Our regular math teacher was on maternity leave and we had a substitute. Explaining her classroom management skills is impossible – it was hugely comical. I was guilty of creeping up to her desk behind her back, while she was surrounded by students who were waiting to get their work checked. Not only did I just creep behind her back, I also made a neat circle at the back of her head with the chalk powder that was freely available on the ledge of the blackboard! So noisy was the class and so unaware was she of her surroundings, that she had no idea that a neat moon had grown on her crown!

What happened later is another story. One of my classmates tattled to my class teacher. She gave me a dressing down and I was petrified that she would inform my parents. But days passed into weeks and I was relieved that the matter did not reach home. My report for the term came, I had done well. My father with a wicked smile on his face said, “This is fine, but you must learn how to behave in class!” I was stunned. Not only did he know, but my class teacher had obviously kept him informed about the humour of the situation and not to take me to task.

Circa to when I became an educator for the first time, handling a group of kindergarten babies. In those days, threats were quite common to keep a class under your thumb. (I know much better now) I threatened a little fellow that I would lock him in the

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rabbit hutch the school had, if he did not sit in his place. Imagine my shock, when I was summoned to the principal's office the next morning to see the parents of the child there! They had been told by my little poppet that I had actually locked him up in the cage and the rabbits were jumping all over him and he was terrified and couldn't sleep at night! I was lucky that my principal knew better and understood that I had not actually done the deed, and also that young children have active imaginations.

Today, when I look back with the wisdom and experience of being an educator for almost forty years, I can see many things at play here. Educators need to command respect, not demand it. Humour can sometimes be found in the most unexpected situations. My class teacher, in her infinite wisdom, saved her colleague from embarrassment, by dragging me up to apologize. In her own way, she had kept the channel to discipline open. My father obviously understood the comical situation and chose the right moment to reprimand me! My principal, in turn, understood the situation and handled it wisely. That was probably the last time I ever issued a threat that I could not carry out.

Various reasons can disrupt a class and the onus of handling it in the most efficient manner, rests on the wiser between students and educator. No prizes for guessing who!

Before I delve into the strategies on how to handle disruptions, I would like to draw attention to the fact that while some are one size fits all, most of them are age or level-appropriate.

Let us understand the causes of disruption at various stages and then move to how to manage the situation and ourselves.

Foundational years: causes could range from

Separation anxiety
Physical discomfort
Fear of new adults
Poor social skills
Specific learning challenges

What can we do?

- **Reassure to prevent meltdowns:** Simple reassurance in a warm and compassionate tone saying that you are there for them and you will look after the situation, will help prevent a huge meltdowns that can spread to other children too.
- **Look for the cause not the symptom:** Sometimes what we see and what the child is trying to tell us, needs close

attention and observation. Treating symptoms does not help in the long term. It's important to address the root of the issue. For e.g., a child fears going to the washroom: is naturally uncomfortable and starts crying. Is it only because the child needs to use the washroom or could it be a case of something that happened in the washroom – either at home or at school – due to which the fear has set in?

- **Check if the child is hungry, or wants to use the washroom, or has an ache somewhere:** These are standard physical needs that can disturb a child in the early years. Find out if the child has been abused in any way. Report immediately if so.
- **Observe for social interactions:** Children's interactions with peers and adults can reveal a lot about their state of mind. Children who tend to be on their own, beyond normal levels, will need special attention to examine the cause.
- **Provide positive reinforcement wherever possible:** Sometimes that's all it takes to draw out young children. We say success breeds success. Similarly, feeling good about oneself makes for healthy individuals. Do not lose any opportunity to praise or 'catch a child doing good' and praise and encourage publicly.
- **Watch for a week for any change after your intervention:** In case you have used any of the strategies. Watch for changes to begin showing.
- **If all fails, take a deep breath, involve parents and work as partners:** Since the child is ultimately the parents' responsibility, make them your partners in helping the child. Speak to them, ensure confidentiality and find out what's happening at home. Then design a workaround together in the interest of the child.

Primary years: being a little more grown up, issues can be

- Body shaming
- Bullying
- Lack of engagement in class
- Physical discomfort or challenge
- Unhealthy home environment
- Lack of attention
- Introduction to a new environment
- Excess screen time
- Inability to cope with class or be higher than the grade level
- Birth of a sibling or bereavement in the family
- Composition of family setup (single, separated, divorced, living with grandparents, adopted)

These are impressionable years, where awareness is certainly higher, but not sufficient to manage themselves completely.

- Bullying and body shaming (too short, too tall, too fat, too thin, some other impairment), in my experience, are the most common issues for a child to feel low and therefore seek attention in any way possible. This can take on the form of aggression as retaliation too. Here, both sets of kids require remediation. Again the same strategy of

treating the cause and not the symptom applies. Bullies are often the victim of bullying themselves in another situation and they take it out when they have a chance. Maybe he or she is beaten at home as a form of discipline and so feels it's normal to bully their juniors.

- This is usually when a second child is in the family, or the child may have lost a grandparent, so your student feels neglected and unimportant. Be aware of these dynamics and give the child enough feel-good boosters to prevent disruptive and attention-seeking behaviour.
- This is the time when children get hooked to digital forms of entertainment. While it is difficult for educators to regulate what happens at home, lack of focus and inability to remain attentive to the task on hand are some of the signs that the child could be addicted to the screen. Violent vocabulary and actions and frequent usage of dialogues from screen shows are also signs to watch out for.
- Not being able to perform to grade-level expectations or not feeling valued and loved enough, leads to low self-esteem. Children often seek to distract the class and test the boundaries of their teachers or parents by engaging in behaviour that can be frustrating. It is important at this time to show the child that he/she does not have the power to get under your skin. Remain super calm, however difficult it is! Breathe, breathe, breathe, and breathe again before giving any response. This is where the mindfulness activities mentioned later in this article will help you.

Middle and high school years

With bursting hormones and the need to assert their independence and identity, coupled with academic pressures, these years can present enormous opportunities for learning, both for parents as well as for educators. Some of these outlined below may sound familiar and there will be more for you to add!

- Body image
- Peer pressure
- Teen hormones
- Sexual awareness
- Lack of class engagement
- Bullying
- Fear of rejection or not belonging
- Examination pressure
- Sleep and appetite issues
- Excess screen time
- Loneliness
- Home issues
- Comparisons/self-esteem issues
- Career pressures mismatched with abilities
- Relationship issues with opposite or same gender
- New environment and peers

As experienced educators, you will be quite aware that this list is not exhaustive. At no given moment can one say exactly what is going on in a student's mind and what makes him/her behave in a disruptive manner. Each life stage is sensitive and can have lasting impressions on their minds if not handled compassionately, yet firmly.

Of these, the ones that educators have to deal with most frequently have to do with sexual awareness, screen time, peer pressure, and academic expectations. These years also present the highest challenge in working with parents as partners, as parents' expectations most often are disproportionate to the abilities and interests of the child. There is denial on the parents' part and everything then becomes a vicious cycle. Nipping issues in the bud is the golden rule to follow. Do not let matters escalate till they get under your skin.



There is no readymade formula for handling parents' anxiety about their child's future. In a country where education is the means to a living, it is but natural for them to worry, in case the child needs to take the road less travelled. Exposing parents and children to new-age careers to impress upon them that there are several routes to a successful future. It will also help to bring down the number of suicides that happen due to children feeling a sense of failure.

It is also important to accept that at this age, sexual awareness heightens and an interest in either the opposite or sometimes the same gender can be seen, and that this is normal and natural. Sex education classes and responsible and respectful behaviour towards each other should be conducted compulsorily from grade 5 or 6 onwards. Waiting, or procrastinating, or skirting around the subject only attracts the risk of children being misinformed or turning to unhealthy digital stimuli. The concept of digital citizenship should form part of the curriculum. The internet is not just for entertainment, but also a productive responsible means to do good to the community at large.

It is important for a student at any level to know that the adult is in command and control.... Not in an

authoritative way but in a reassuring way. They need to know that you have their back and will see them through the disruptive phase. You need to be able to earn that trust.

Humour is a great weapon that we most often miss. As educators, we tend to take ourselves very seriously. Humour can diffuse many a situation in the classroom and in fact serve to build relationships with the students.

As children grow, it is good for both student and educator to work as partners too. Seek students' inputs, let them work out consequences, allow them to frame rules... more likely that something they have participated in making will not be broken too soon.

And above all, model the behaviour you expect your students to follow. If raising your voice is your means to discipline, then students too will normalize it. If anger is a weapon you use to control rather than reasoning, then students grow up learning that anger is alright to use. This again is a vicious cycle. So role modelling, even when you feel your worst, is what will stand in good stead.



While it is natural for educators to get frustrated and be at a loss sometimes, it is important to accept that this is normal and believe that it can be handled with a little effort. Teaching young children is no mean task – it takes a lot to do one's best. It can be physically, emotionally, and psychologically stimulating as well as draining. Balancing one's relationship with all stakeholders in the ecosystem is a tightrope walk that needs you to be on your feet all the time. Add to that family responsibilities and demands – a perfect cocktail that can get heady sometimes. The rest of the world may say that it's a cakewalk with paid vacations, but how much of a cakewalk it is, was made amply clear during COVID-19. Parents, for the first time, began to look at this profession with different eyes. Managing one or two children at home was a task for them, and they began to wonder and appreciate how educators managed 30 and 40, not even their own!

So let us not feel guilty about self-care. For it is self-care that will give us the resilience to manage those blips in the classroom.

Here are some self-care tips that are common to all in the profession and will come in handy during those frustrating moments that we all continue to face. Hence, preparation is the key!

1. **Get some 'me time' every day:** Most of us tend to get so absorbed in our daily demands and routines, that we miss giving time to the most important person in our lives – ourselves! Whatever be the circumstances, carve out a little time, without any guilt, where no one is allowed to disturb you. You may feel guilty at first, the family may find it odd, but ignore it and learn to enjoy those moments with yourself.
2. **Learn to say 'no' even to close ones if it is too much for you:** Stretching far beyond what we feel comfortable with to please others can lead to suppressed frustration. This boils and spills over at the last straw trigger, which could be that disruptive class or child. Hence, learning not to bite more than one can chew can only happen when we are able to say 'no' to demands that stretch our limits in any way.
3. **Eat healthy, stay fit:** This aspect does not need any elaboration. Teaching is a demanding and tiring job and it requires us to be fit at all levels – physically, emotionally, and psychologically. We need to work on all three aspects to be on the top of our game.
4. **Learn to prioritize your time:** Sort out tasks into each of these four quadrants in order of importance. A) Urgent and important B) Urgent but not important C)

Important, but not urgent D) Not urgent not important. Once we classify our tasks in this manner, managing our time becomes easier and more effective.

5. **Prioritize activities that promote mindfulness:** Mandala colouring, breathing exercises, yoga, meditation, and such. This is an extremely important part of building resilience for the workplace. Mindfulness activities help us build focus and calm, and when done regularly and systematically, can transform us for the better. In turn, we are able to cope with the stressors around us with much less effort and heart ache.
6. **Do one thing that you deeply enjoy every day:** Self-love is an important part of self-care. We can give happiness to others only if we have it ourselves. Hence, make yourself happy by doing something everyday that you truly enjoy. This is different from 'me time'. Me time could be reflective, but happy time is doing time. It could be tending to a plant, listening to your favourite song, reading a few pages of a book, singing, meeting, or talking to friends, playing with your pet, going for a walk, watching tv, cooking, ... just about anything, provided you enjoy it and it makes you deeply happy.
7. **While it may be difficult not to bring work home, set aside a fixed time to switch on and switch off:** Keep a fixed time for work-from-home activities. Keep your boundaries well-defined and do not let one run into the other.
8. **Set aside some time every month to upgrade yourself professionally:** Professional upgradation through reading or attending sessions (virtual or physical) doing a short course improves our knowledge of our vocation and also provides new strategies to deal with new situations in this dynamic scenario. Staying current and updated is also one of the ways to improve thinking on our feet. Knowledge and skills together make a powerful combination.

The world is changing rapidly. Our children live in a world dominated by technology. They no longer need the educator for knowledge as Google baba serves the role very well. They need us educators to make them better human beings and citizens for the future. Hence, our ways and methods of conducting ourselves in the classroom also need to change. Authority with understanding, assertiveness instead of aggression, compassion without judgement will help us build bridges with our students more effectively. We cannot hope to shape the tomorrow of today's children using ways that we used yesterday! The change lies in each one of us.



Finding peace of mind with nature

Adithi Muralidhar ✍️



Photos courtesy: Adithi Muralidhar

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The world is running at a faster pace than ever before. Whether it is the access to digital technology or information overload, we are all living lives that are characterized by constant mental stimulation. And yet, if we decide we want to break away from it all, and gather ourselves to experience a moment of peace and calm, there is one timeless remedy that never ceases to disappoint. *Nature*.

Being in the midst of nature and observing nature has a profound impact on physical and mental health. This is not merely an experiential statement, but is also supported by a growing body of research (see References). Nature has the potential to instill calmness and a sense of wellbeing that can be transformative to human beings. It is no wonder that we often seek to escape into the mountains, beaches, and other picturesque locations to connect with the vastness and beauty of landscapes, the gentle rustling of leaves and the rhythmic flow of streams.

My own life in a chaotic metro city is punctuated by intervals of escaping into the wild. Somehow, these moments spent in the heart of the jungle seem to offset the bane of living in a polluted and crowded city.

The act of observing wild animals invokes a multisensory experience, and it requires one to have a heightened awareness. Take the classic example of walking through a forest. When you are walking deep into the jungle, looking to have an encounter with a wild animal, every fibre of your body is primed with anticipation, excitement, instinct, fear, and heightened senses. Not many situations can make you feel all of those things at once!

Languid to lively afternoon

I remember this one lazy afternoon in December 2017. We were visiting the jungles of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The morning of that day, we spent more than six hours outside observing birds and butterflies. We thought to take a break in the afternoon, for most wildlife activity dips during the hotter periods of the day. I was seated in the balcony of our quaint homestay, browsing through the pages of my bird field guide. My eyes were almost drooping, but I was determined to stay awake. *Why waste precious day time in sleeping when you are in such a beautiful place*, I thought to myself. From the balcony, I could see some coconut trees between me and the stream which was no more than 50 metres away. As I gazed out at the charming landscape from the balcony, I noticed what appeared to be some movement near one of the trees. I walked

up to the edge of the balcony to get a better look and squinted my eyes to concentrate my view near the foliage surrounding one coconut tree. After a few minutes, I thought that perhaps my eyes had played a trick on me. I went back to where I was sitting.

A couple of minutes later, I saw movement again. But this time, the movement was on the tree itself. I got my binoculars out and there I saw it: a gigantic *monitor lizard* making its way up the tree.

The monitor lizard's scales blended seamlessly with the tree bark as it climbed upward, moving with a clumsy gait. My curiosity piqued, for I wondered if it had spotted something or was on the hunt. I checked the tree for nests or other forms of life. As the lizard circled the bark, I lost sight of it but caught glimpses of its sharp claws gripping the tree. Glued to the bark, the lizard seemed to be part of an unfolding drama, and my previously drowsy mind, was now on full alert, anticipating scenarios from a National Geographic documentary. The best part of this situation was that the lizard was not aware of my presence and therefore I got to observe an unadulterated episode of natural history: *a day in the life of a monitor lizard*.

A passing glance of this specimen could lead one to think of it as a baby crocodile, for monitor lizards can grow quite big. These carnivorous reptiles, native to Asia, Africa, and Oceania are known to defend their territories and hunt actively. But unfortunately, on this particular afternoon, while I hoped for a dramatic prey-predator scene, the lizard had decided to just explore around.

An hour passed, and I silently observed the lizard stuck to the bark and finally making its way down to the ground. Once it touched the ground, it was constantly flicking its tongue to get a sense of its surroundings. As the foliage it ventured into thickened, I sighed with sadness, realizing that my view would soon be obstructed. And as if on cue, it disappeared right in front of my eyes.

What I thought was going to be a lazy and sleepy afternoon, turned out to be quite an exciting nature observation spree. I am not sure what it is about such moments that manage to capture one's attention and set one's mind down a captivating path.

Self-discovery through nature

Personally, it feels like the act of observing nature encourages a rare sense of mindfulness, a practice that involves being fully present in the moment without

judgment. Whether you are on a quest to look for wildlife, or you are observing birds or reptiles, or if it is even watching the sun dip below the horizon during the last few minutes of the day, or repeatedly watching the waves crash on the edges of the rocky cliffs, these experiences anchor individuals in the present giving them respite from the past and the future.

The beauty of nature observation is that it is not limited to “beautiful” places or “a specific time”. It’s a revelation when you realize you don’t have to be “in the middle” of a jungle to experience this feeling. You can experience it even in the most chaotic city where elements of nature thrive in the most unique micro-habitats: be it the black kites and cattle egrets opportunistically feeding from a pile of trash or a colony of frogs actively feeding on mosquito larvae in the gutters.

With a keen sense of observation now ingrained in my everyday life, I realized that I find unexpected delight when I see resilient wildlife fighting all odds in the dirty city sewers just to survive. No doubt, this is not the future we want for our urban biodiversity, but the sheer resilience of tiny creatures living in filth showcases nature’s adaptability. It translates into a positive message of strength and perseverance in us human beings who so often struggle to find meaning and strength to deal with complex situations. This message has the potential to etch in our minds a deeper appreciation for the simplicities of life and a fresh perspective on convoluted challenges in life.

Additionally, for me, observing nature seems to promote a sense of interconnectedness with the world around us. It makes us reflect on how we, as individuals or a community of human beings, are connected to the web of life and how our actions have repercussions on all living and non-living things around us. It leads us to a corridor of introspection and contemplation. This awareness can also help develop a sense of humility

and responsibility towards the environment, which I feel is much needed in today’s world.

In summary, I would argue that observing wildlife and natural habitats is not just a way to quench one’s stress and curiosity, but rather it is an introspective journey that nurtures the peace of mind and body. It does seem like nature is the precious antidote we have all been looking for our entire lives!

Note: The above article has excerpts from a previously published blog post by the author and can be found here <https://earthlynnotes.com/2019/11/16/an-afternoon-with-a-giant-lizard/>.

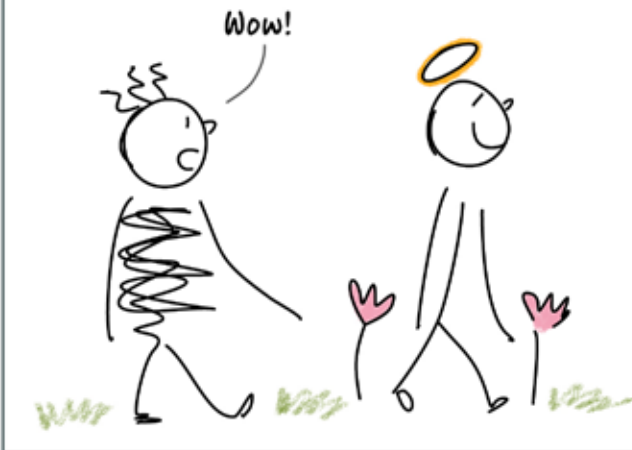
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THE LIFELONG LEARNER: **LEARNING TO STAY CALM**

I'VE ALWAYS ADMIRED PEOPLE WHO SEEM CALM



AND I THOUGHT THAT STATE WAS UNATTAINABLE



BUT SOMEONE ONCE GAVE ME A TIP



AND NOW I KNOW THAT BEING CALM ISN'T ABOUT BEING UNAFFECTED



BUT KNOWING HOW TO COPE WHEN YOU ARE



AND TAKING ONE STEP AT A TIME



Music to the rescue

C Rama Devi ✍️

Educational institutions should be safe havens, where students can learn, grow, and thrive. However, conflicts, bullying, and disciplinary issues can disrupt the learning environment and affect students' wellbeing. Maintaining peace in schools and making them anger-free zones requires a comprehensive approach that involves students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

Ensuring a peaceful atmosphere in school requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of the students. By fostering a positive school culture, implementing conflict resolution programs, addressing bullying and harassment, encouraging student participation, supporting teachers and staff, and engaging parents and the community, schools can create a harmonious learning environment where students can thrive.

In my 40 years of teaching, I have always wanted to ensure that my classroom was both calm and peaceful as well as productive. I was mostly successful, as with a subject like science, innovative ideas and hands-on activities are not very difficult to incorporate into the class. But, as teachers, we have incidents now and then when the class goes out of control. In such situations, I either used to send the student out of the class or leave the classroom myself, or make the child sit right in front me, or call their parents. These were my usual go-to remedies.

But there is one incident that had a great impact on me, and I remember it clearly to this day, because on that occasion I didn't use my usual remedies. There was a lot of chaos in the playground that day. A group of junior students was very restless and wanted to vent their anger on a group of senior students. I had no choice but to listen to them as they were uncontrollable. Meanwhile, the senior students also approached me, complaining about their juniors. With both sets of students talking, there was uproar in my room and no one was ready to listen. Both groups wanted my attention, but they were not ready to listen to me. I tried to pacify them, but they did not pay heed. Suddenly, an idea struck me. I told both groups that they would be heard only if they sat down calmly. My deep faith in music and meditation came to my rescue that day. I played soothing music for these students and I asked them to ponder on it until their emotions were in check.

For the next 15 minutes, they sat with their eyes closed. Soon the aggression and chaos had disappeared. Both the groups were at peace. They came to an understanding and left no work for me to do. Peace was restored.

Restoring peace in school is in the hands of the teachers. The wellbeing and success of students lie in a harmonious learning environment. We must promote this, as conflict resolution is the first step to reinforcement of positive vibrations in our education institutions.

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Chaotic lessons

Kalpana Sharma ✍️

Without order, nothing can exist- without chaos nothing can evolve. Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing – Oscar Wilde

A teacher's life is a roller coaster ride, and yet, I have always enjoyed this ride. No matter how well one plans and prepares, most often there is something unexpected that emerges in the classroom. As teachers, we shoulder immense responsibility to nurture young minds. Our individual quest comes alive as we look forward to building connections with our children. Fortunate enough to be working in a residential setup of a Krishnamurti school, I have had many rich learning opportunities that resulted out of chaos in the classroom or hostels. No school uniform, no ringing of the bell after a class ends, no rewards and punishments, little importance to structure – a free flowing space, where there is so much freedom that it can lead to chaos.

There are some implicit incidents and many explicit ones that are an integral part of living as a community. That's the beauty of a residential setup. Working in a K school, where a lot of stress is laid on interrogation and coming together in a space of freedom, chaos is very common. Having worked in a mainstream school earlier, I found it so simple and easy when things were structured and everything was plugged in the right way. I often felt 'oh wow how disciplined! There appeared

so much uniformity and equality at every step. When I switched to a K school, I found everything here chaotic. There was so much confusion and disorder everywhere. But now, after a decade, I can see the difference – here we have chaos on the outside, but there is order inside. In my earlier workplace, there was order outside but chaos inside.

A few anecdotes will help you understand this chaos on the outside and how we as adults approach it.

The slipper chaos

In our school, we leave our footwear outside before entering common spaces and classrooms. Often, the slippers are all over the place. As an adult, one can shout at the children and get them to keep their slippers in order in one go, but I have often been touched by how one of my colleagues approaches it. He handles this chaos by following the tagline 'virtues are caught and not taught'. As children move to the assembly or their classes, he quietly sits down and arranges the slippers in order and in creative ways. Slowly, I began to notice that even without any instructions, children became more mindful about the way they left their footwear.



Photos courtesy: Kalpana Sharma

Kalpana Sharma has taught for more than two decades in different places and grades. Her experience with under-resourced schools and educational colleges makes her realize that we need to work with children to address their different learning needs, especially at school. She teaches English and has a deep interest in inclusive education. She is currently working as Junior School Headmistress at Rajghat Besant School. She can be reached at kalpana.sharma@rajghatbesantschool.org.

Snakes in the classroom

Once two snakes made an appearance in a classroom. I was not a witness to this incident, but my daughter was. As she narrated it, what emerged was that the teacher spotted the snakes first and asked everyone to calm down by taking some deep breaths. She then sent for help and got the children out of the class. As I visualize it, it wouldn't have been that easy for me, as I am really scared of snakes. But it helped my daughter in many ways to handle chaotic situations like these, which emerge now and then as we live on a campus that is rich in biodiversity.

The little squirrel gets stamped

This happened during recess one day. A class 6 boy inadvertently stamped on a squirrel and one can imagine what transpired next. Several children who caught sight of this, clubbed together, shouting, instructing, and wanting to be saviours. It was utter chaos. Some children started crying as well. By then, the squirrel climbed up a leaf, but to add to its distress, the leaf was thorny. The children weren't able to stand its pain and were somehow herded off to class. They came back after the period got over, I was watching from a distance, by now many ants had covered the squirrel. Two boys came forward with their teacher, picked the squirrel up and buried it.

That evening, post dinner, during our regular dialogue session, one boy mentioned this incident and thereafter what emerged was priceless. The children were able to forgive the boy who accidentally stamped the squirrel. They said that if one can't reduce the pain for someone that is dying, we shouldn't make it worse by trying to be saviours. What we can do is to distance ourselves and give space and time to that person. Giving ourselves a little space can help us respond and not react in such situations.

A talk with Chawanprash – the TIGER ant and the Incy Wincy spider family

Our campus is home to tiger ants. While the children already living here fondly call them Chawanparash, the newer children are usually scared of them, as these ants pop out anytime from anywhere; sometimes countless during the rainy season. When the new children see them,



we have a musical melodrama in the house. One day a little boy just pitched in the chaos and started a narration, “Oh this Chwanparash family is now here and see they are going to meet the Incy Wincy spider family. In no time, a chain story emerged and the whole chaos died down.

My little ones love to talk so much

I teach classes 3 and 4. My students are so full of energy that it is extremely difficult to get them to do anything together. So, I often enter the class by playing a song to grab their attention, and play ‘Simon says...’ to settle them down and open their books.

Over the years I have realized that chaos is not bad at all. There is always something beautiful that emerges. We may not know it at that moment, but if we are able to look at the chaotic situation with positivity we can push ourselves to be creative, to think outside the box, and help our little young minds face challenges and support each other.

For me, I have always tried to take a step back, take a deep breath and come into the moment to remind myself – here comes an opportunity, grab it with patience and creativity. Don't let it go.

“One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.”

I often remind myself of this statement by Friedrich Nietzsche and tell myself to take it easy so that I don't lose out an opportunity to create dancing stars and also help the many young minds I am responsible for, to realize this.




Cutting out **STRESS**

A pair of yellow scissors is positioned as if it has just cut through the word "STRESS". The scissors are yellow with black handles and blades. The word "STRESS" is in large, bold, colorful letters: S (red), T (yellow), R (green), E (orange), S (red), and S (pink). The scissors are cutting through the letter 'E'.

Designed by Shilpy Lather



A person is sitting on a bench in a forest, looking out over a misty landscape. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The trees are silhouetted against the light. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Keep calm and stay positive

Anju Dhawan ✍️

Anju Dhawan is a passionate educator, entrepreneur, author, TedX speaker and motivator. She started her career as a teacher and now owns a company, SMS Consultants, that provides professional consulting services to schools. She can be reached at <info@smsconsultants.org>.

To keep calm and stay positive in today's world full of stress, anxiety, and worry, isn't easy, but it is a great skill to inculcate. We all spend a lot of time regretting the past, worrying about the future, comparing our lives with others, or fearing the unknown. Most of the time, it is not the situation, but our negative perception of the situation that leads to stress and anxiety. Anxiety mostly builds up of smaller issues. Therefore, having a positive attitude and looking at every situation as either a challenge or an opportunity is very important. Staying positive, calm, and motivated has become extremely necessary under the present circumstances, considering all the chaos and uncertainty in the world. This attitude is not something you can acquire in one day, it comes with everyday practice, persistence, and lifestyle changes. Learning to remain calm is a skill that can be developed over time by taking a few positive steps.

To stay calm, the first step I take is to become aware of my thoughts and emotions and try to manage them in the best possible manner. Whenever I have negative thoughts, I try to replace them with positive ones. For example, earlier if my output at work was not as per my desire, I would think, "Today is not my day, things are just not moving." In a similar situation today, however, I tell myself, "Everything is fine and I can do it." Such positive thoughts calm me down and help me take control of my work and life.

I strongly believe a positive morning routine can set a vibe that boosts the mood, promotes wellness, and helps to stay calm and motivated for the rest of the day. Mornings should be full of sunlight, hope, and motivation to give you the required push for the day ahead. Therefore, I have incorporated meditation, pranayama, affirmations, *mantras*, prayer, reading and writing in my morning routine. Meditation helps rid the stream of thoughts that maybe crowding the mind and causing stress. Mornings should be full of hope, faith, and motivation to give you the required push for the whole day. It should help us see bright opportunities every day. Exercising and nature walks also keep me calm. Being in nature or simply watching nature pictures can create many positive emotions and increase creativity.

To stay positive and calm I also ask myself questions and answer them honestly. In any negative situation, the first question I ask myself is, "Is this a genuine problem, or am I overthinking?" If it is a genuine problem, I ask myself, "Can I do something about it?" If I can do something about it, I would rather take those actions. If nothing can be done about the situation, then it's better that I accept it. It's simple – act or accept, worry is useless, particularly when appropriate action is what's called for.

Life is a battlefield, win or lose – keep calm and stay positive!



**Keep Calm
&
Stay Healthy**

Image courtesy: Anamika Sharma

**Dr. Anamika Sharma and
Dr. L. Ravithej Singh** ✍

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Teaching involves significant emotional and psychological challenges. The pressures of managing a classroom, meeting diverse student needs, and adhering to administrative demands can take a toll on teachers' mental health. The most common problems that teachers face in the classroom on a regular basis are:

- a) **Stress:** Constant peer pressure to meet educational standards may lead to chronic stress, which is exacerbated by time constraints and high expectations from the school administration and parents. Prolonged and continuous exposure to stress eventually leads to burnout.
- b) **Anxiety leading to depression:** The demands of teaching lead to performance and social anxiety. This coupled with a lack of support and recognition contributes to feelings of depression.
- c) **Impostor syndrome:** Many teachers experience the impostor syndrome, a psychological pattern, where individuals doubt their accomplishments and fear being exposed as frauds. Despite their qualification and success, teachers with an impostor syndrome may feel inadequate and constantly worry about their competence and performance.
- d) **Lack of work-life balance:** The demands of teaching often extend beyond school hours. This poses a challenge for teachers to maintain a healthy work-life balance. The pressure to grade assignments, prepare lessons, and participate in school activities can encroach on personal time, leading to increased stress and decreased overall wellbeing.
- e) **Behavioural challenges:** Managing a classroom with diverse behavioural issues of students requires patience, skill, and emotional resilience. Persistent behavioural problems in students can lead to frustration and helplessness in teachers.
- f) **Isolation:** Teaching in under-resourced schools can mean limited interactions with colleagues, which makes it an isolated profession. Feelings of isolation can contribute to loneliness and negatively impact mental health.



Various strategies to maintain calmness while teaching.

These problems, therefore, require a multifaceted approach for teachers to remain happy and hold a sense of satisfaction and efficacy, wherein professional development, a proper support system, work-life balance maintenance, adequate administrative support, regular mindfulness exercises, and professional collaboration are some of the key parameters to be considered. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, schools can create a healthier and more supportive environment for educators, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students.

Teachers need to balance many tasks, which cater to student needs while also maintaining their personal wellbeing. The mantra "keep calm and stay healthy" offers an energetic approach for teachers to fulfil their roles while remaining energized and effective. The key parameters that aid teachers and their teaching, by creating a positive and productive learning environment while maintaining calmness and freshness, are highlighted in the figure above.

"Keep calm and stay healthy", is therefore an essential mantra for teachers striving to balance the demands of their profession with their personal wellbeing. By maintaining calmness and staying energized, teachers can create a positive and dynamic learning environment that benefits them and their students. Embracing these strategies can lead to a more fulfilling and effective teaching experience, ensuring that teachers remain passionate, resilient, and inspired in their invaluable roles.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinions of their affiliates or employers.

Keep calm and click refresh

Anuja Venkatraman ✍️

Anuja Venkatraman has been associated with the Interest group of dialogue, fraternity, and justice in Azim Premji University after completing her M.A. in Education. Prior to that she has worked as a facilitator in alternative schools in Bengaluru and is currently researching in the area of conflict resolution education for schools. She can be reached at <anuja.venkataraman@apu.edu.in>.

Whenever I get worked up or overwhelmed about something – deadlines to meet, an unruly child, or a disgruntled parent – I have learnt, over time, to remind myself of certain things. These things are so simple that writing about them seems trite, as one is sure that everybody already knows about them. Still, sometimes they seem to elude us right at the time we need them the most, and so it feels worthwhile to repeat them, as much for others, as for myself.

Stress is a signal that the various expectations put on you are beginning to overwhelm you. When you sense you are reaching this point it helps to give yourself the gift of silence, which I attain through mindfulness, walking, or doing something that helps to go beyond the onslaught of thoughts. Followed by looking inwards at the content of the thoughts. I find that giving myself time to reflect, to let all my worries pour out on a journal helps me to zero in on what is exactly bothering me and why. Once I face myself with honesty, I am able to think of the ways in which I can deal with the expectations. Which tasks are the most important, what I should prioritize, with whom I need to have a pending important conversation, what better preparation I need to face a recurring challenge. What can I change and what should I finally learn to accept? I find that many answers lie waiting inside if one takes the time to find them.

The solutions can then be elaborated upon and followed by actions. I usually find that by the time I reach the point of action, I am more sorted, connected with my feelings and sense of purpose, and cognizant of what has been blocking me.

Feeling stressed reminds me of the need to maintain a balance of silence and thoughts and not lose myself in the flow of responsibilities. If I follow a cycle of mindful work, which includes planning, action, reflection, and silence, I see that I am able to maintain a calm hold on both my inner and outer life.

I find that cultivating hobbies or interests that are different from one's professional work also helps to keep calm and stay inspired. According to Barbara Oakley, a professor of engineering whose online courses on learning are one of the most popular MOOCs in the world, learning happens best when the mind switches between focused and diffused mode of thinking. While the focused mode is associated with the abilities of concentration like a beam of flashlight, the diffused mode happens when you relax and allow your mind to wander. I find this idea very useful and inspirational. Indulging in hobbies that allow me to relax helps keep my mind fresh and ready to function. It also helps me appreciate how important it is to encourage children to do the same.

While I realize that every individual has to find what works best for them, there probably are certain principles that can work for everyone. Keeping calm and clicking refresh – finding ways to remain enthusiastic, motivated, inspired, and reminding oneself of the joy and meaning of one's work and the people we work for and with is one of them.

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KEEP CALM & DANCE

Fareen Wahid 

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Illustration: Fareen Wahid

Not one, not two but teaching four subjects at a time, my day travels at a million miles per hour – swirling in lesson plans, class discussions, and endless assignments to grade.

Teaching is an enriching yet demanding profession, where constant mental alertness and emotional resilience are required. In the daily chaos of teaching, what keeps me grounded and how I find solace is by doing something a little unusual – dance.

My poster will have the words, 'keep calm and dance'. These words best sum up what helps me keep the balance both professionally and personally.

I always liked the beat and freedom that come with dance. While I do not have formal training in it, dancing is close to my heart. It started as a private indulgence, something that I did in the privacy of my room. Over time, dancing evolved into a vital coping mechanism – a way to release tension and express emotions that words often fail to capture.

One of my favourite memories is from an inter-school dance competition. The auditorium was abuzz with loud chattering, sharp lights on the stage, and foot tapping music. Between student performances, I would take the floor and dance, genuinely enjoying the moment. The energy was so infectious that I couldn't help but pull the other teachers onto the stage. The students cheered, and us teachers cut loose, letting go of the usual classroom formalities. That impromptu dance didn't just bring me closer to them, it also sent a message to the students that it's all right to have fun and express yourself, whatever your age or position.

My impulse to dance is not limited to spaces and events where music is playing. There are times I find myself grooving in the school corridors or even in the elevator when no one is watching – or sometimes when everybody is! You will likely find me doing a little shimmy on my way to class or tapping my feet while waiting for the copier. These unplanned dance moments are fast-moving, jovial reminders to live in the present moment and not take life too seriously.

I dance when the weight of my responsibilities becomes too much. It is an instant mood lifter. The moment I hear music, my body begins to move, and all my stress begins to melt away. It's like hitting a reset button that helps me get back to work with renewed vigour and a fresh mind. It gives me a cognitive break from the demands of teaching, which makes it very much like active meditation. As my body moves to the music, my mind rests. My body feels happier and more relaxed from the physical movement and endorphins produced, which are natural stress relievers of the body. This is what sets the mood for me to stay excited and pertinent as an educator.

Apart from decreasing stress, dancing also empowers me. It reminds me to embrace joy and creativity in all aspects of my life, even teaching. Including dance in my routine pushes me to bring more dynamism and energy into the classroom. Whether using movement to explain a historical event or geographical zones, dancing makes learning more engaging and memorable for my students as well.

Teaching is such an intellectually stimulating profession that we live more in our minds than in our bodies. In a way, we are disembodied. Dancing grounds me and makes me more aware of my body. It serves as a reminder that despite the responsibilities of the profession, it really is quite important to carve out some time for oneself. The very act of dancing – moving freely and without judgment – reiterates self-expression and authenticity. It's a way to honour one's passions and keep one's spirit alive.

"Keep calm and dance" isn't just another phrase, it's a life philosophy that helps me navigate the demands of teaching with joy and resilience.

One child at a time

Lakshmi Mitter ✍️



Lakshmi Mitter has several years of experience writing children's stories and articles on the importance of raising readers. Her quest to enable children to enjoy reading and derive the multiple benefits thereof led her to write and illustrate over 40 customized children's storybooks through her venture, MerryGoBooks. Continued efforts in this field led her to establish Talking Circles. Through Talking Circles, she hopes to enable children to express themselves freely, be open to a variety of perspectives, show one another empathy and in the process grow together. She can be reached at < lakshmi@talkingcircles.in > .

An old man walking on the beach one morning sees a lot of starfish washed ashore. As he walks along the beach he sees a young man at a distance. At first, it seems like the young man is dancing. When he goes closer he realises that the young man isn't dancing, he is throwing the starfish back into the sea.

The old man asks, "Why are you throwing the starfish into the ocean?" "They will not be able to bear the heat of the sun as time goes by."

"But there are so many along the coastline. How many can you save? What difference is it going to make?"

*The young man bends down, picks up another star fish and throws it into the water. Then he says, "It made a difference to that one starfish." (This excerpt originates from the famous story *The Star Thrower* by Loren Eiseley. This story made a big difference in my life.)*

As an educator, I want to help every child that attends my sessions realize what they are truly capable of. I teach small groups of children. One of the most important lessons these children have taught me is that everyone is unique. I cannot implement a standard practice or method for all and expect them to learn equally well. I need to listen to them, only then will I learn how to teach them in a way that they can understand. If I must follow this approach, I must accept that it is impossible for me to reach out to all the children and make a difference to each one of them. There are times when this approach can get overwhelming. I feel at a loss when I don't know how to help a child. My thoughts tend to spiral. I ask myself if I can make a difference to all the children who attend my sessions.

It isn't easy. It takes time. Every teacher reading this, I am sure, will agree when I say that our patience sometimes runs out. Frustration sets in. What could I do differently to make a difference to many? At such times, the young man in the starfish story comes to my rescue. He always reminds me, "One at a time." This helps me pace myself. It helps me to focus, actively listen, emote, and understand the child's perspective. Then comes about a sense of clarity and direction. Conversations follow. We figure a suitable way together. The child gives it a try. Gives up sometimes. The challenge is not to join in in giving up, but offer a helping hand to try again. And when it finally happens, when the child realizes that they are good and don't need someone to tell them that, it is worth the wait. One child at a time. It is not possible to make a difference to all at the same time. One child at a time, one day at a time.





Keep calm and remember the little things

Ashwini Subodh Pathak ✍️

Ashwini Subodh Pathak is a chemistry teacher at DSK school, Pune. She has a good rapport with the students and has a keen interest in their academics, projects, careers, and overall wellbeing. She can be reached at <ashwinipathak17@gmail.com>.

As a school teacher teaching grades 8 to 10, every minute in school is energetic, exciting, and demanding. It demands alertness, attentiveness, patience, and endurance. No matter what, teachers can't lose their calm.

Students might not be attentive, might not do their homework, might cause mischief in class, and might disturb you and the other students, but the teacher has to remain calm and carry on with her work. No matter what the child does, the teacher can't scold them, beating is out of the question, no punishment, no harsh words; so under the guise of being calm, the teacher has to be stoic with an ice slab on her head. The rules, regulations, media, and parents have made the teacher cold and stolid.

So, what keeps me going? What keeps me calm and able to carry on? Is it the paycheck? The yearly, monthly, daily planning? The experience I have gained? The orders of my seniors? My determination? Yes, all of these do help, but they can't help me carry on calmly. I often meditate to introspect what keeps me going.

As I close my eyes, I can see a student who says, "Teacher, it was fun learning today." Another one smiles and exclaims how lab work was exciting, a third one says what I taught helped him do all the sums in the

class, a shy student speaks very well in the assembly after a lot of practice. It is the confidence on their faces, the 'sunshine smile'. It is when alumni return to school and say, "Ma'am, we remember your teaching; we miss it." Small gestures from students, like giving a flower or card saying 'we love you', help me carry on. Batch after batch, I've learnt many life lessons, which help me keep calm and carry on.

In any given situation at school, I always think – if it was my son, what would I do? The empathy, love, affection, and heartfelt blessing that my child should succeed, be good, overpowers all other emotions. When a child misbehaves, talks disrespectfully, I always think, maybe he has a problem at home; she didn't mean what she said, she didn't mean to talk back; perhaps he is not in a good mood, maybe he hasn't eaten his breakfast, he might be sad... so this motherly care, love, and understanding about every child and the wish that my students deserve all good things in life keep me calm.

Come what may, I never curse them. How can a mother curse her children? This drive, this emotion, keeps me calm. So, in today's materialistic world, when my children are exposed to various temptations at their fingertips, their innocence, childhood, and dreams at stake, how can I let go off their hand? I must keep calm and carry on.



Keep calm and seed the future

Bincy Mary George ✍️

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The phrase 'Keep Calm and Seed the Future' inspires me as an educator because it helps me focus on the present while keeping the future in mind. Managing a classroom of 30 or more students is often chaotic. Our natural response to chaos is to react with more chaos. However, as an educator, my response in every situation, whether it's a student's triumph or setback, must remain calm and measured.

Educators are often likened to gardeners nurturing a garden. Unlike builders focused solely on completing tasks, gardeners have a lifelong commitment and influence. Children, like plants, require daily care, discipline, and guidance as they grow and develop. Education is not a finite project; it's about enjoying the journey and opportunities for growth. In today's fast-paced, standardized educational environment, true education transcends mere success metrics, particularly in the face of trends like "The McDonaldization of Society," as described by George Ritzer (2014) in his book by the same name. This concept, originally applied to the fast-food industry, has permeated various aspects of modern life, including education.

In the context of education, McDonaldization refers to the standardization, efficiency, and predictability that have increasingly shaped learning environments.

Schools and educational institutions often prioritize measurable outcomes and standardized testing, aiming for efficiency and uniformity rather than nurturing individual growth and creativity. This approach can sometimes overlook the diverse needs and potentials of students, reducing education to a transactional process focused on immediate results. A true educator instead instills values like hard work, critical thinking, a love for learning, and mutual respect – values essential for lifelong success.

Preparation is key, not just for achieving goals but for navigating life's challenges as well. As Jeetu bhैया from the Netflix series rightly said, good preparation itself is a form of success, and education prepares students for life's challenges. It's a continuous process where an educator's role extends beyond the classroom.

As educators, we are sowing the seeds of the future with a clear vision for our students, our nation, and the global community. This vision demands insight, dedication, time, and understanding from educators. We must recognize the potential in every student, even when others may not. In challenging situations where schools, systems, or families may lose hope, educators must persevere. We must always see the potential for brilliance in every student, even if it's not apparent today.



Keep calm and embrace self-care

Kanwal Singh ✍️



Illustration: Kanwal Singh

Kanwal Singh is an education consultant with over three decades of experience in special and inclusive education. She is a member of the consultancy team at Enabling Education Network in the UK. Her book *Hanging On – A special educator's journey into inclusive education* was published in 2020. She lives in New Delhi. She can be reached at <kanwalsingh.in@gmail.com>.

We are navigating a turbulent era marked by rising mental health issues, diminishing attention spans, and global challenges like pandemics, geopolitical tensions, and climate change. Rapid technological advancements, including AI and digitalization are reshaping education. Teachers face the daunting task of adapting to these changes while managing an overwhelming workload, from grading, report writing to planning for a diverse class, handling parent concerns, social media addiction among students and an ever-expanding to-do list. Teaching often feels like juggling 10 balls on a unicycle on a tightrope, with constant demands both inside and outside the classroom.

Teaching is incredibly rewarding. ABSOLUTELY. Physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. YOU BET.

How do we prevent becoming stressed, grumpy, and over-caFFEinated versions of ourselves? The answer lies in self-care.

When you hear “self-care,” you might roll your eyes and think, “Oh great, here comes another wellness buzzword.” I was in the same boat a few years ago, convinced that self-care was just another flashy trend with more fluff than substance. But then my body decided to throw a dramatic tantrum and said, “Look, either you start taking care of yourself, or I’m going to start shutting down.” That wake-up call made me realize that self-care isn’t some fleeting craze – it’s actually crucial. ***If I wanted to keep doing what I loved, I HAD to start prioritizing my own wellbeing.***

So, what is self-care, really?

Self-care isn’t about pampering yourself or indulging in luxury. It’s a set of daily practices designed to maintain

your physical and mental wellbeing. It involves nurturing yourself and recharging your personal batteries. It’s about integrating habits that keep you healthy and centred, helping you manage stress and enjoy life without feeling overwhelmed.

Incorporating self-care into my routine made a significant difference. By setting aside time for myself, I learnt the importance of recharging. Simple actions like taking short breaks, exercising, eating better, and spending time with loved ones helped me manage stress and maintain focus. Self-care also taught me the value of setting boundaries, learning to say no and balancing professional demands with personal wellbeing.

Here are some things I learnt about self-care:

1. **Self-care is not selfish:** Self-care might sound like a code word for selfishness, but that’s not true. Prioritizing self-care isn’t selfish; it’s necessary. Just as passengers must put on their own oxygen masks before helping others, you need to care for yourself to be effective in your role – be it personal or professional.
2. **Self-care is not a one-time activity:** Self-care is not a quick-fix. It requires a consistent routine and care, much like tending a garden to experience benefits.
3. **Self-care is not expensive:** Effective self-care doesn’t require spending a fortune. Simple and free activities like walking, meditating, or spending time with loved ones can be incredibly effective.

Incorporate self-care into your daily life. By focusing on your wellbeing, you’ll be better equipped to handle the demands of teaching and enjoy a more balanced and positive life.

So, take a deep breath and embrace self-care – you deserve it!



Keep calm and create curiosity

Chatura Rao ✍️

Chatura Rao is an award-winning journalist and story writer, and a teacher. She enjoys writing stories based on research, co-created with community members and grassroots organizers. She is a visiting faculty member at the Srishti-Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Bengaluru. She can be reached at <chaturarao@gmail.com>.



Some years ago, I was working as a full-time faculty member at a college of art and design. A journalist and author by profession, I had never formally led a class before, leave alone at the university level.

I parked my car in a lane outside the campus, the first morning of the teaching term. Watching students enter the gates, my confidence unravelled very quickly. They seemed so grown-up, clever, and even world-weary. How could I interest them and keep them engaged in what I had prepped? I sat in the driver's seat, but felt far from calm. I tried to breathe deeply, but shallow was all I could muster.

So, still sitting there, I took out my notes and went over my lesson plan. I was to introduce the 13 students registered for my five-week class to information-based narrative making/design. The institute encourages experimental styles of teaching, so I planned to work with ideas and activities that excited me as a research and writing professional. I hoped these would fire the students' imagination!

The 18-year-olds I met that day, and for nearly all weekdays during those five weeks, turned out to be curious, imaginative, and eager to learn. They explored each idea and activity. They admired and debated them over, feared some, tired of others, and greeted several with delight. All of these drove up the energy and engagement levels at the sessions.

The students used different styles and tried a variety of mediums to produce narratives that ranged from comics to short stories, artworks like a wall mural and paintings, and illustrated essays. They worked really hard, driven by the strength of the ideas they had examined and made uniquely their own.

My first group of students subsequently graduated with design degrees, and went on to work in the industry. I imagine them applying the subtlety of their intelligence, their sentience, in the wider world.

My learnings from this first experience with teaching have helped me keep (mostly) calm through every class since.

I learnt that I can trust my students to be curious and energized by ideas, like I am ... they are more likely than not to walk with me. They are as likely to point out new ways of seeing and making, that help each other, and me, learn further.

And this trust can open a space for 'grace'.

Grace, to me, is an energy that participants bring into a working or learning space. Collective grace adds a kind of magic to step-by-step processes; it clears the way for imagination and enquiry. I try to trust this energy to yield learning for everyone involved.

When holding space for grace, I'm most likely to meet the learner in a student. And as a teacher, to meet the learner in myself, again and again.



Keep calm and freeze



It's just a
snake!



Sinny Mole 

Photos courtesy: Sinny Mole



Sinny Mole has been a math teacher and Assistant Coordinator, Primary-2 at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Reliance Foundation School, Reliance Greens, Jamnagar. She can be reached at <sinnymolepm@yahoo.in> .

Life lessons come to you when you least expect them. My children and I came away from an annual excursion trip in 2016 to a wildlife sanctuary with more than just enjoyment, togetherness, and fun.

Our batch for the camp comprised 40 children of class 5 and four teachers. We were visiting the Hingolghadh Wildlife Sanctuary in the Rajkot district of Gujarat. We reached the campsite in the first week of August in 2016. The duration of the camp extended over three days and two nights. It was a never-before opportunity for the children to explore and experience unknown places and situations. For many of the children, it was their first time travelling without their families, and the camp provided them with opportunities to be independent and exercise self-discipline. Such experiences contribute significantly to a child's holistic development.

The Hingolghadh campsite had a zoo that showcased different types of snakes. The forest department personnel talked to us briefly about the snake species in the zoo. Now, not many animals evoke an extreme emotional response from humans like snakes do and as more people encroach on the native habitats of snakes, snake sightings near human settlements have become more common.

Interestingly, snakes are more afraid of us than we are of them. Basically, snakes are not aggressive. All the same, it is best that we watch them from a distance. In fact, all snakes, venomous or not, try to avoid their human neighbours and resort to striking or biting only when they feel threatened. If you leave them alone, you should have no problem at all. The most

important thing is to not panic, which means that one must do some work on managing one's fears. The key to education is here.

The zoo personnel had organized an activity for handling and playing with pet snakes. It was a most interesting and fun activity for the children. It is important to understand these creatures, be compassionate, and consider their right to live in nature. Not frightening the snake is important. The goal of this camp was to help build a healthy level of respect for snakes and to gain knowledge on what to do if one spotted a snake.

So while we were being told to wear shoes to protect our feet, be alert, and walk vigorously to alert the snake to our presence (this in case we were in an environment that housed snakes), a child asked, "What should we do if we spot a snake, despite all these measures?"

"Keep calm, and freeze," we were told.

It is important not to panic. When we freeze in our spot, a snake will not consider us a threat and move away on its own.

When we are afraid, we often end up doing something to cause ourselves harm. By trying to escape the snake, we are actually inviting harm to ourselves. The snake will perceive any sudden movement from us as a threat to itself and strike at us. Instead, if we are able to control our emotions and stay still, the snake will leave us alone. Isn't this a lesson that will come in useful in many situations in life?



Keep calm and stride on

Latha Vydianathan ✍️

Latha Vydianathan practices reflective writing rigorously and advocates the practice for self-improvement, especially for educators. She believes it is the path to finding solutions instead of suffering with the problems. She can be reached at < latha.vydianathan@yahoo.com >.

The symphony of teaching is a beautiful journey with a complex composition. Amidst the demands of lesson plans, assessments, and student needs, finding moments of calm is essential for maintaining balance and effectiveness. For me, reflection is the cornerstone of my tranquility.

At the end of each day, I retreat to a quiet space to ponder about the echoes from the classroom. These moments of introspection are akin to tuning a finely crafted instrument. I replay interactions, analyze decisions, and celebrate small victories. Through this reflection, I identify patterns, refine my approach, and nurture a deeper understanding of my students.

It is in these quiet moments that I rediscover the heart of my profession. Beyond the curriculum and the grades lies a world of young minds yearning to explore, question, and grow. Reflecting on their spark, their challenges, and their triumphs rekindles my passion and reinforces my commitment to their success.

Of course, teaching is not solely about introspection. It demands action, creativity, and resilience. But it is the balance between reflection and implementation that creates a harmonious symphony. When I feel overwhelmed by the weight of expectations, I return to my reflective space. Here, I find solace, clarity, and a renewed sense of purpose.

In a world that often prioritizes productivity over wellbeing, I believe that reflection is a radical act of self-care. It is a testament to the belief that effective teaching begins with a calm and centered educator. By nurturing my own wellbeing through reflection, I am better equipped to create a nurturing and inspiring learning environment for my students.

One particular incident tested the depths of my composure. A superior's critical eye, once a source of pride, became a weapon of intimidation. The once-familiar space transformed into a minefield of tension. In those challenging moments, reflection became my lifeline. By dissecting the interactions, I realized that my patience was being tested, not my competence. This understanding empowered me to respond calmly rather than defensively.

The subsequent denial of a well-deserved promotion was a bitter pill to swallow. Yet again, reflection proved to be my ally. Instead of dwelling on the injustice, I channelled my energies into self-improvement. I used the time to deepen my knowledge, expand my skill set, and refine my teaching philosophy. This period of introspection led to a clearer vision of my career path and the courage to seek opportunities beyond my current institution.

Eventually, a new role presented itself, one that aligned perfectly with my aspirations. The journey to secure this position was hard, but the confidence gained through reflection propelled me forward. I had transformed disappointment into determination, and adversity into growth.

So, while the classroom may be a whirlwind of activity, my reflective practice is the steady anchor that keeps me grounded. It is in these quiet moments that I find the strength and wisdom to navigate the complexities of teaching and to create a lasting impact on the lives of my students. It is a testament to the belief that even in the face of challenges, a teacher can emerge stronger, wiser, and more resilient. So stay calm and stride on creating your own charm.

Keep calm and bloom

Dharti Vaibhav 

Dharti Vaibhav is an integral learner, living and learning from Anahad, a community near Hyderabad. He works as a school consultant, coach, and curriculum designer who also works with homeschoolers. He has 15 years of experience in Integral Education. He can be reached at <vegmaan.mbk@gmail.com>.

Kabir says,

“धीरे-धीरे रेमना, धीरे सब कुछ होय ।
माली सीचें सौ घड़ा, ऋतु आए फल होय ॥”

(Dheere-dheere re mana, dheere sab kuchh hoy.
Maalee seeche sau ghada, ritu aae phal hoy.)

Meaning – go slow, have patience, good things take time. The gardener may pour a hundred pitchers of water, but the fruits will come only when the season comes.

In a classroom where varied energies, thought processes, and emotions play against each other, it becomes very important for a teacher to keep calm, as without it concentration and right discernment is not possible. This couplet by Kabir reminds me to remain calm and carry on with the work in hand. Here, I share a few practices that help calm me.

Practice 1: Flower I adore and adorn

I wear a flower in the buttonhole of my shirt or keep a flower on my desk in the classroom. I hold the flower gently to get back to the essence of my being, sometimes just as a reminder to calm down. I carry a flower with me, especially to meetings.

Practice 2: Lotus of gratitude

Mukulahasta is a mudra in natyashastra. In Sanskrit, mukula means a blooming bud and it is depicted by bringing the tips of the fingers together to take the form of a closed bud. In times of chaos and classroom

dysfunction, relax and make the mudra. Instead of shouting at the top of your voice, start counting your blessings and show your gratitude by opening one finger at a time. The students are the blessings, all unique and seeking love, giving love. As all the fingers open, we get another mudra – that of a lotus in full bloom, padma mudra.

Practice 3: Sing a song

When there is chaos around, I start singing my favourite songs. Sometimes, I ask the children to sing along. One such song is from the plum village album, composed by Thich Nhat Hanh, Breathing In Breathing Out. There is a line in this song, ‘I am blooming as a flower,’ which reminds me that one day we all will bloom and there is no need to ‘boom out’ (shout).

Practice 4: Just be

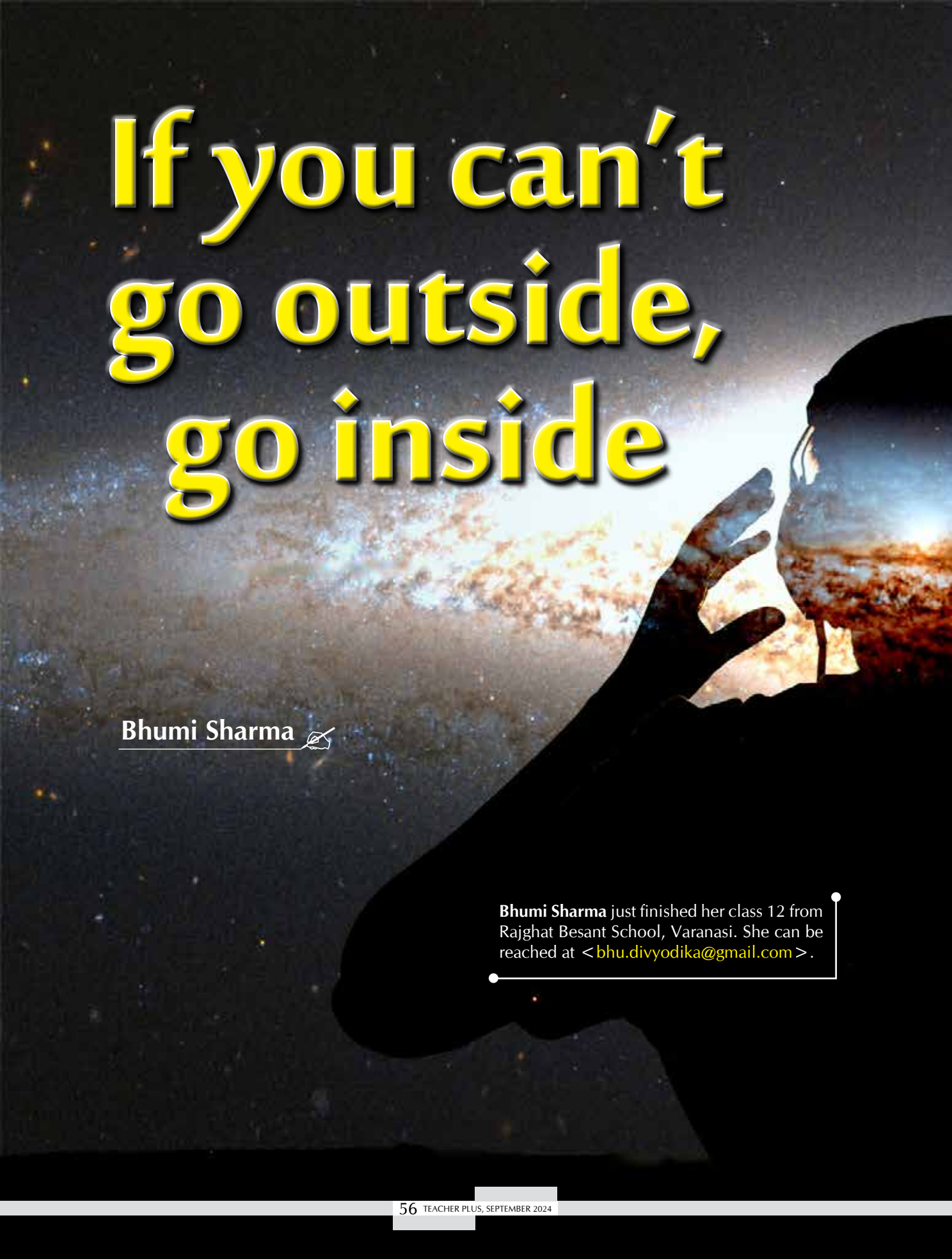
Just hold the posture of a bud. Just be a flower, a smiling one. Connect to the vastness, or your breath, or the space beyond the mind. This allows one to open to the universal source and let the calmness and peace descend upon one.

We are all like flowers with our own essence. We will bloom at different times. Keep looking for those learning moments for yourself as well as in the students.

The Kabir couplet also reminds me not to panic or get too stressed. Things will happen in their own time. So, hold on calmly. Don’t react. Let the action come from just being.




If you can't go outside, go inside



Bhumi Sharma ✍️

Bhumi Sharma just finished her class 12 from Rajghat Besant School, Varanasi. She can be reached at <bhu.divyodika@gmail.com>.



This phrase keeps me calm. There are times when we all feel a bit overwhelmed and troubled. That's when I remind myself – "If you can't go outside, go inside."

And it helps.

But then the question arises, "How?"

All it requires is a pause, a halt. Take a pause, whenever you feel troubled. Breathe in, breathe out.

Close your eyes and look inside yourself.

Reflect and stay with yourself and your thoughts. You might see an ocean of problems. Don't get overwhelmed.

To understand any problem, we must give it our undivided attention. We must look at the problem as a whole without any judgements, biases, or complications.

Start with the small.

J Krishnamurti in one of his talks in Ojai, California said, "Root of understanding lies through the small, the trivial. Without understanding the small, thought – feeling cannot go beyond itself." So take one thread at a time, and slowly you will be able to unwind the enormous entangled wool of thoughts inside you.

This is how I keep myself calm and untangled from any outer/inner disturbance. It is very necessary to stay calm and have a stable, still and open mindset while learning.

Whenever I have to take a dip inside, here's what I do:
Take a walk.
Journal a lot.
Listen to music.
Talk to myself in the mirror.
Play my violin.
Watch my breath and emotions.
Remind myself I am me, I am good, as junk is not made.
It is always the air in the balloon that makes it fly and not the colour outside.

Mindful moments for a calm life

Anshika Bedi ✍️

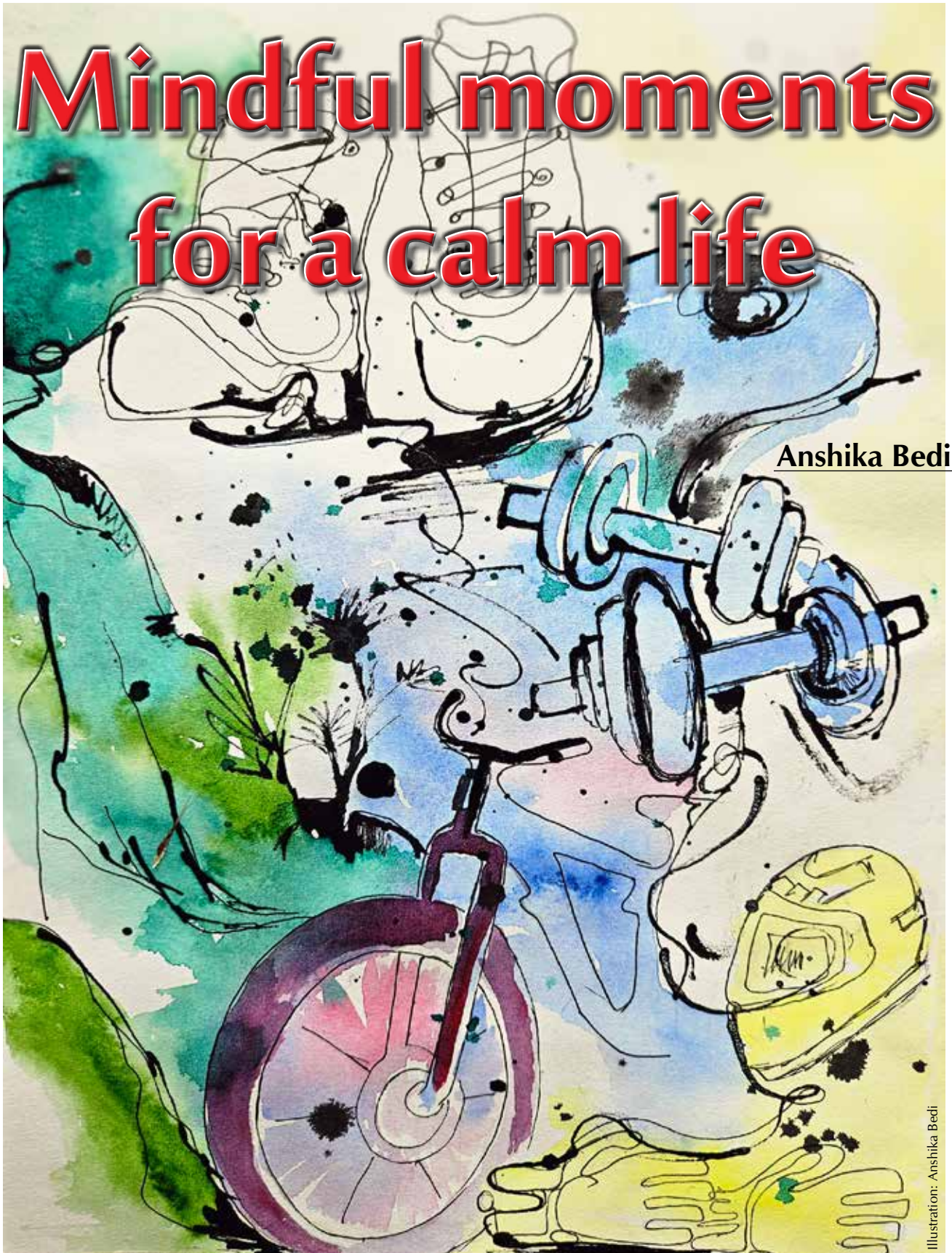


Illustration: Anshika Bedi

Meditation exercises often made me anxious. The process of learning calming techniques and practicing them correctly has always been challenging for me. When I was asked to write about what keeps me calm, I discovered several strategies that suit my personality and needs.

Being a calm person, in general, is a more attainable goal than trying to calm down during a crisis. It involves taking small steps over time rather than attempting to control a disaster with a panicked mind. This journey to calmness is about shifting your mindset, which comes from listening to your inner voice and finding the motivation to make positive changes. As a thrill-seeker, I find that I calm down with activities that stimulate dopamine release. Engaging in these activities and gradually incorporating new habits into my routine has helped me cultivate a sense of calm.

One of the most important lessons I've learned is the value of consistency. There is always time to cultivate a peaceful state of mind, even if it's just for 10 minutes a day. Consistently connecting with activities that you love can keep you grounded and calm. This consistent effort, coupled with the belief that practice leads to improvement, has been crucial in my journey.

For instance, I make sure to take naps when needed, as sleep is essential for a creative and calm mind. The unconscious mind processes and sorts through confusion while at rest, which is vital for mental clarity and discipline. Additionally, I seek hands-on experiences, whether it's cooking, baking, cleaning, repairing, crafting, playing a sport, painting, gardening, or organizing. Engaging in these activities helps me stay focused and achieve larger goals.

Self-care is another key aspect of maintaining calmness. For me, going to the gym is like visiting a temple. It's a sacred routine that I follow, even when it's challenging to get up early when everyone else is still sleeping. During these moments, self-talk helps me stay motivated.

Travelling is also an integral part of my approach to staying calm. I often plan trips that involve physical activities or sports I've been eager to try. Learning and achieving something new adds excitement and a sense of accomplishment, which boosts my mood and enhances a positive mindset. I find this kind of growth, whether in my small garden or elsewhere, to be incredibly fulfilling.

Lastly, paddling and cycling are activities that help me relax and recharge. These physical exercises challenge both my mind and body, providing a holistic approach to calmness. Additionally, encouraging others in the cycling community brings me joy and a sense of purpose.

In summary, my "keep calm" philosophy encompasses various strategies that promote physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. By taking care of my health and focusing on activities that bring me joy, I am better equipped to help others. As the saying goes, "Your future is created by what you do today, not tomorrow." This serves as a constant reminder to take time for myself and prioritize my wellbeing.

Remember, "Love your body, and it will love you back." Nurturing ourselves is not just a necessity but a form of self-respect and love, creating a harmonious balance between the mind and the body.



Anshika Bedi is a passionate teacher known for her innovative art and inspiring educational approach. She strives to cultivate creativity and a love for art in all her students. She has been in the educational field for more than 16 years and is presently working as a primary years Visual Art Coordinator for Pathways school, Noida. She can be reached at <Anshikamarwahbedi@gmail.com>.

World peace follows inner peace

Dr. Jerry Jean ✍️

Dr. Jerry Jean is a PhD in English and a UGC NET exam coach. She loves drawing, acting, and singing among many other things. She believes that “Life is a gift from God to become the best version of ourselves and to be a blessing for others.” She can be reached at <jjean960@gmail.com>.

Everyone wants world peace. When I tell my daughter about the international wars today, she asks me, “Amma, will a war happen here?” I ask her, “Are we peaceful on the inside? Are we free from fear, jealousy, insecurity, anger, and other negative emotions?”

If we want peace on the outside, we should work on our inner peace first. We have to work to get rid of the *shad ripus* (six enemies of the mind according to the Indian philosophy) – *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *mada* (ego), *moha* (attachment), and *matsarya* (jealousy).

A similar idea is echoed in the seven deadly sins from Christianity: pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth.

So, I tell my daughter to work on her inner peace first. If you feel angry, jealous, impatient, work so hard on your own goals that you have no time for these emotions. If you are afraid of public speaking, work so hard at it that you’re no longer afraid of it.

We must develop courage, fortitude, and emotional self sufficiency within us, before we expect wonders on the outside.

As a practitioner of yoga and meditation, I truly believe that world peace will follow inner peace. The universe reflects back to us what we are on the inside. If we work on our *shad ripus*, gradually we will be able to face whatever befalls us. This inner peace will also spill into our interactions with others, who may be inspired to work on themselves too. And bit by bit, soul by soul, we will spread peace.



KEEP CALM AND



Yukti Lao ✍️

Yukti Lao is a pre-primary teacher working at Salwan Public School, Rajendra Nagar, New Delhi. She can be reached at <yuktilao@gmail.com>.

All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them. – Walt Disney

For educators, our world is brimming with constant challenges, rapid changes in the education system, and unending demands of the school administration and parents. In such a scenario, the mantra "keep calm and dream big" serves as a powerful reminder to navigate our lives with tranquillity and ambition. It is a blend of maintaining composure amidst chaos while nurturing grand visions for the future.

Often, we find ourselves stuck in days full of routine and mundane moments. I believe that dreaming big has nothing to do with reality, responsibility, or to-do lists. Do you remember when you were asked in school, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I recently paused and reflected upon my own dreams. To my sheer delight, I found myself being a more creatively inspiring individual.

The power of staying calm

Maintaining one's calm is crucial for managing stress and making clear decisions. In high-pressure situations, a serene mind enhances problem-solving skills and improves communication. When confronted with obstacles, staying composed rather than reacting impulsively allows for objective analysis and thoughtful action. The benefits of staying calm include improved decision-making, enhanced resilience, and better interpersonal relationships.

The art of dreaming big

Dreaming big involves envisioning a future that is not bound by current limitations. It means setting ambitious goals and striving towards them, even if they seem

unattainable. Big dreams drive innovation, personal satisfaction, and societal progress, encouraging individuals to explore new possibilities and push beyond their comfort zones. Key steps to nurturing big dreams include defining a clear vision, setting realistic goals, embracing setbacks as learning opportunities, and seeking inspiration from supportive networks.

Balancing calm and ambition

Achieving a balance between calmness and ambition is essential. While setting lofty goals is important, managing the stress associated with pursuing them is equally crucial. Strategies for maintaining this balance include:

1. **Practicing mindfulness:** Engaging in mindfulness practices such as meditation helps manage stress and maintain focus on long-term goals.
2. **Prioritizing self-care:** Regular exercise, a balanced diet, and adequate rest support mental and emotional wellbeing, fostering a resilient mindset.
3. **Celebrating progress:** Recognizing and celebrating achievements, no matter how small, boosts motivation and reinforces commitment to big dreams.

Conclusion

"Keep calm and dream big" is not just a motivational slogan but a practical approach to a fulfilling life. By maintaining composure in the face of adversity and nurturing ambitious goals, individuals can effectively navigate life's challenges and pursue their aspirations. This balanced approach leads to meaningful success and personal satisfaction, enabling individuals to achieve their dreams while enjoying the journey.

So, take a deep breath, stay focused, and let your dreams soar high!



What we can learn from the children

Vimala Nandakumar ✍️

Photos courtesy: Vimala Nandakumar



The Shaktii Girl's Education Trust started its activities in June 2015, as an after-school programme for underprivileged girls of Kharghar, Navi Mumbai. Only girls of class VIII and IX enroll in our programme. We are now 10 years old and it has been an exciting and extremely satisfying journey.

The girls who enroll with us are from the economically disadvantaged sections of the city, apart from being academically challenged. Most of the girls are first generation learners. We provide two years of intense training in English, maths, science, life skills, and also provide personality development. At the time of enrollment, the girls walk in with hesitation and diffidence. After two years of training, we see confident young girls leave the centre, ready to take on the world.

Most of the 200 odd girls at Shaktii are on the path of realizing their dreams, having witnessed their seniors basking

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in the glory of theirs. One of the girls has become a doctor, two are preparing for UPSC exams, two sisters have completed their graduation.

Every year, the mentors at the centre observe certain issues with the girls. Some of them are common to all girls. New girls from different backgrounds and different schools join us. They know that the mentors welcome them with open arms. However, the initial days are always challenging for the girls as they feel that they have to be accepted by their team mates. And yet, sometimes they surprise you with their maturity and end up teaching you a lesson or two as the two incidents narrated below illustrate.

Incident 1

A few days into the Shaktii programme, in 2023, we invited a guest who wanted to play an ice breaker game.

He asked the girls to take a sheet of paper and list down their friends' names.

Silence followed for the next five or ten minutes. Each girl thinking and worried that she should not even inadvertently miss out on any of her friends' names so that she doesn't offend them.

After a few minutes, our guest asked the girls to give him their sheets.

To our shock, one of the girls had not written even a single name on her sheet.

The whole class went silent as they had also not expected this.

When asked why she had not written any name, the girl said that she had no friend and that no one liked her at the centre. We could hear her clearly, as the rest were stunned by her response.

The girl was in tears and could not speak for the next two or three minutes about how she felt isolated.



Even before we could grapple with the girl's response and address it in some way, Arpana sprang up from her place, shaking her head vigorously, saying that this girl's name was first on her list. "Dear, you are my best friend!" she said lovingly with a smile. Siddi was the next to show us her list, which also had the girl's name!

Soon all the girls came rushing towards this girl, surrounded her and hugged her while she continued to cry, for a different reason now.

She must have felt miserable not being able to read the minds of her classmates. Most of this inferiority complex is created by the home environment, the parents, and relatives. This girl loved her one-year-old brother, but the extra affection he received from her father must have been difficult for the 13-year-old to handle. In addition, her dark skin and weight were other issues that bothered her parents, who in fact should have been telling her that these were non-issues.

She carried the baggage of being a non-entity at home to the school and the Shaktii Centre all these days. Since we focus on how the girls feel and give them opportunities to speak their minds and ask for support, we could detect this early at the centre. She had painted everyone with the same brush. Today, she feels accepted by all, more importantly, she has accepted herself.

She is probably the most gifted and spontaneous girl of the batch. We are hoping that she continues her journey with more confidence.

Incident 2

On 22 June, as part of the orientation programme, we had planned a fieldtrip to a Zumba studio, where the girls would also play the African djembe drums.

Seven girls had extra classes till late in the afternoon and therefore would not be able to join us. The rest of the girls at Shaktii – former, current, and new – were all excited.

One day before the fieldtrip, I got a call from Siddi, one of the seven girls, saying that the extra classes were cancelled. She wanted to know if the seven of them could join us.

The bus was full and there was no way I could ask these seven girls to join.

I was upset and miserable. I pleaded with Siddi not to tell the other six girls that I couldn't take them as the bus was full.

Siddi, the 14-year-old, came up with the most astonishing and mature reply, "It's perfectly alright ma'am. Please go ahead and enjoy with the rest of the girls."

Her voice did not reveal any trace of disappointment! I was amazed at her response and asked her how she could be so calm?

Her reply came as a shocker. "You, at Shaktii, taught us this too ma'am."

We feel blessed to be spending four hours a day among these incredible girls of Shaktii.

It is a misconception that we mentor them. In fact, there have been instances where they have mentored us.



Finding peace by living naturally

Meenakshi Umesh ✍️

Today there is a realization that globalization has perhaps not had entirely positive impacts. That the greater the distance between the creator and the user, the more poverty it would mean for the creator and the more toxic the product. Our present-day lifestyle is partly the result of the contemporary education system, where in the name of health and hygiene we are using extremely strong medicines and toxic chemicals. To increase the production of food, we promote the use of artificial fertilizers and terribly poisonous pesticides that are systemic and are destroying ecosystems. Our needs for energy are increasing and the forest cover has decreased to abysmal levels.

Meenakshi Umesh started Puvudham Learning Centre (www.puvudham.in), based on Gandhi's Nai Talim after she decided to move to Dharmapuri, a village, from Mumbai. Her move came after she realized that city life was harming her and her children. She can be reached at <director.meenakshi@puvudham.in>.

Photos courtesy: Meenakshi Umesh





Knowing fully well that our so-called comfort is causing deep discomfort to the planet and ill health to our children and ourselves, we continue to perpetuate the same myths about success, progress, and increased GDP through the education system. Many people are now slowly realizing that having more material goods does not mean more happiness. Many are seeing the connection between toxins in the environment and the illnesses in our bodies. Many people are moving towards minimalistic living and sustainable and regenerative farming, local markets, gift economy, and even local currency!

Gandhiji, feared that the physical comforts we gain would lead to mental discomfort and emotional imbalance. He realized that the problem of mechanization and industrialization would lead to dehumanization and destruction and cautioned that the use of machines would cost us our humanness. He wrote extensively in *Hind Swaraj* about how our lives would be impacted by our dependency on machines. Gandhiji perhaps intuitively knew that dependency on machines would mean dependency on the market and that would take away real freedom and sustainability from the villages and impoverish them further. He envisioned a new society where wisdom was gained in schools and spirituality was nurtured by engaging in meaningful and productive activities like farming, spinning, weaving, carpentry, cooking, cleaning, and maintenance to provide for our daily needs. His belief was that as long as we keep creating with our hands and meeting our needs locally, we will be able to exercise some control over our lives. Nai Talim was Gandhiji's vision of an education system that was designed to integrate the heart, head, and hands. It is a way of life, not a pedagogy of education.

On his 75th birthday on October 2, 1944, he made this the theme of a major speech. Education, he said, must not be thought of as confined to schools. It must continue throughout life, "from conception to cremation;" it must touch every aspect of daily living and help every man and woman be a better citizen of their village, and therefore a better citizen of India and the world. It must aim at expanding their mental horizons; it must inculcate a spirit of neighbourliness, which would rise above narrower loyalties and do away with untouchability and with communal jealousies and suspicions.

Gandhiji was in fact calling for an all-round training in "non-violent democracy," and developing the thought

he had expressed earlier: "The real remedy (for exploitation and injustice) is non-violent democracy, otherwise spelled true education for all."

Gandhiji's belief in nonviolence and peace curated this system of education, where both children and adults learnt through engaging with their hands in creating products, services, and systems using their emotional connection with the material, their intuitive understanding of it, and their intellectual involvement in making life meaningful through service to other beings.

"There is no way to peace; peace is the way". Education for peace means learning to live with peace, daily and hourly, wherever one happens to be. It means learning to tackle and resolve the tensions and conflicts of outlook and interest with prudence and fairness sensitively. These are a necessary and valuable part of human experience. To this learning of the way of peace, the principles and practice of Nai Talim have a great deal to contribute.

The three pillars of Gandhi's pedagogy were its focus on the lifelong character of education, its social character, and its form as a holistic process.

Education is not simply putting in information, it is drawing out the hidden potential for good in each human being. It is not concerned only with the intellect, but equally with the body and spirit. Literacy is just a tool, a means to an end. It is not an end in itself. It is not always necessarily the best tool available for attaining the real end, which is the all-round development of the human being. It certainly is not the first tool for education, whose nature demands activity and purposeful work. Gandhiji wrote 80 years ago, "I must confess that up to now all I have said is that manual training must be given side by side with intellectual training. But now I say that manual training should be the principal means of stimulating the intellect." This meant that the manual training must be "scientific." There must be full appreciation of the chosen handicraft in all its points of contact with natural science and human history, its standards of accuracy and beauty, the part it plays in the wellbeing of the people who practice it and in the enrichment of human life as a whole. Handicrafts taught in this way, far from being a mindless drudgery, could stimulate endless intellectual curiosity on a great variety of topics. They opened the door wide for research and discovery.

At Puvudham for the last three decades we found that every word of what he said is true!

I had a lot of questions about the life I lived in Mumbai. During my college education at Sir JJ College of Architecture, travelling in the suburban train from Ghatkopar to Victoria Terminus, opened my eyes to the disparity and meaninglessness of life in the city. The only freedom we had was the freedom to choose between the various products offered in the market. The air was polluted, the water was chlorinated, and the food was adulterated. When we visited our village in UP, Muzzaffarnagar that year, I realized that my life need not be trapped in the city. I could choose to not live in the city! What was stopping me was my fear, my inhibitions, and my biases. As I reflected on my schooling and my future, I felt that schools were designed to make us fit into the rat race of the city. I felt that all the problems in the society were because of the way the schools were. When I was 18, I had read Gandhi's *My experiments with Truth*. I read it again and decided to experiment with my life. I had one chance to live and I decided to live it without the fear of failure or the aspiration to success.

I left the city, came to Auroville and slowly came to the conclusion that my life had to be connected with the land. I decided to farm to ensure that I got unadulterated food for myself and my children. We bought a patch of degraded land in Dharmapuri district and my education in complete Swaraj started. I learnt how to conserve soil and water. I learnt to identify the various trees and herbs to grow them in the nursery and plant them on the land, carry water to them and nurture them, to care for animals, and to heal myself with local herbs and homegrown food. As the children came one by one, I decided that I would home school them. They need not wait till the age of 25 to learn



swaraj! They could learn as they grew. In fact, I found that each child is capable of self-rule in the way that Gandhiji wanted each human being to have agency over their own lives and serve others around them.

At that time, I did not know about Gandhiji's Nai Talim. As I observed my children grow, I found that they loved to do whatever I was doing. If I was in the field weeding, they were helping with weeding, asking if they were pulling out the right weeds. If I was watering the garden, they brought water in vessels. When I was collecting firewood, they picked up sticks and took great pride in carrying their bundle on their heads. When I was cooking, they wanted to cut vegetables and make chapatis. For them there was no difference between work and play. They did with joy whatever activity needed to be done. I intuitively felt that my children would learn more directly from observing nature and working (playing) with their hands creating knowledge than from textbooks.

Gradually, as neighbours began sending their children to our home to learn English, and as the school began to take shape, I decided that dignity in labour was the most important lesson I had learnt during my education towards complete swaraj. So, growing our own food, cleaning and maintaining our spaces, caring for animals and birds, became our basic curriculum. All subject learning was integrated into the activity of gardening. Starting with counting plants, measuring

the garden area, weighing the produce, measuring the volume of water and the growth of plants, we could do all our math in the garden.

Science was even easier! Soil formation, understanding the minerals, materials, simple machines, tools and tool design, PH of the soil, chemical reactions that create all food, human biology, disease and cure, botany, zoology, study of insects and food chains all was easily integrated and understood through live interaction with the elements. Social science was integration of mapping of the plot of land, of the school, locating all the trees, etc., going to the village to do a survey about what crops were grown 20 years ago, how the transport facility had impacted life in the village, the history of the village and who the first inhabitants were and how it grew; civics was learnt when the children themselves started forming governing bodies and a judiciary to resolve conflicts.

Children learn by observing, and so it is up to us to resolve our conflicts peacefully. They are more forgiving, more considerate, and more compassionate because the adults around them trust the children to make good decisions and be fair. I slowly learnt that for the children who came to Puvudham, I was the role model and so I actually needed to work only on myself to be able to influence and inspire them. And the same applied to all the adults on campus. We began to observe ourselves and correct our behaviour.





And the children learnt how to live in such a way as to cause least harm to Mother Earth. My focus was on sustainability and minimalistic living, on creating forests and food so the children imbibed these values.

Nature has created all creatures with a specific place in the cycle of life and death. All microbes, grasses, herbs, bushes, creepers, climbers, shrubs, trees, animals, birds, insects and worms have a function in the food chain and the process of creation of soil and forests to support more life and evolution of life into more stable ecosystems. Humans need to find their purpose in nature. The fact that humans have the ability to observe the various processes and cycles in nature and enhance them through the ability of logical, analytical, and critical thinking to reduce the tendency toward entropy and seek stability and permanence indicates that humans are creative creatures that cannot remain human if they cannot create, or are not able to create, or are not allowed to create.

The contemporary education system is designed to dehumanize and disorient children. They are not allowed to create knowledge. They are expected to swallow it. And they cannot digest it or use it. Parents are made to believe that their children will not have interpersonal skills if they do not go to school. In fact, when children are separated from their parents before five years, they suffer from fear, stress, and frustration. All this amounts to extreme violence and leads to violent behaviour in children. This separation from parents also ensures that the parents are no longer the inspiration. Peers become the attachment and inspiration and therefore there is a lot of dissonance in the child's character. The child is unable to learn discretion and inculcate wisdom for living a good

life by observing its parents. Essentially, the child is lost and ends up following whoever provides the attachment need. While it is true that some parents themselves are clueless about what a good life is and therefore may be unable to provide inspiration for the same to their children, at least the attachment is retained and the child follows the parent instead of being available for manipulation by disruptive forces like advertisements and fascism.

When I came to know about Nai Talim, I was thrilled that common sense had led me to the same conclusions about the education of my children. Children should be with their families and learn whatever trade their families are engaged in and learn to make other products while in the NAI TALIM facility, was Gandhiji's vision. He said that learning to produce is value added to the child as well as the family, especially in economically challenged situations. He envisioned that all the subjects deemed necessary to learn by the education system prevalent then could be integrated with the various crafts and made relevant to the child while also providing opportunities to create products with their hands, bringing peace within their heart and creating knowledge in their mind!

By this time we had created our own integrated curriculum based on the five elements of Sun, Water, Air, Space, and Earth; SWASE – Breath. We had already included spinning, weaving, stitching uniforms, making our own natural colours, cooking, baking, and carpentry into our activities to build self-reliance.

As Dr. Zakir Hussain said at the second National Basic Education Conference in April 1941, "A work-school is a society working for a common end. In its cooperative pattern of labour, the mistake of one may mar the work of the rest. The quick will not be able to leave the slow behind. It teaches its members how to cooperate in spite of their differences of ability and temperament, it teaches them to accept responsibility for their social duties. But the school, like the individual, must work for something more than itself, or it will merely substitute corporate greed for individual greed. The small society of the school must serve the larger society around it."

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Calm in a storm

Aishwarya R 

The naughtiest is always remembered," sighed the headmistress without even looking at the students huddled in her room.

It was a lousy day for the class teacher and class leader. A student, Harish, had grabbed the pen of a fellow student during the math period and sprayed ink all over the whiteboard even as the teacher was lecturing on double-digit multiplication. Class 4-A was notoriously famous for this one student, Harish. He had the most mischievous tricks up his sleeves. From pulling the rubber bands out of girls' hairdos as they stood before him in line to spraying the class walls and whiteboard with ink. When Harish moved from 3rd grade to the 4th, no teacher wanted him in their class. Except for one, Aarthi ma'am, a teacher known for her strict personality. Perhaps that is why the headmistress was convinced that Harish would do well under Aarthi ma'am's watchful eyes.

The detail to which I remember this incident is hilariously horrific. As I stepped into the 4th grade, I had least expected a surprise on the first day of school. Aarthi ma'am was to be our class teacher. She did not seem like someone we could cross paths with. Her demeanour commanded respect and I was certainly not the only one who noticed. As she walked in, all the students stood up and sang their 'good morning' with much more verve than I recollected hearing in 3rd grade.

After she introduced herself, Aarthi ma'am took her seat, holding her notebook, and asked us to introduce ourselves. As we were speaking, she wrote down every single student's introduction in the notebook. She glanced at her notes later and announced to the class, "I think we should have a class leader and I know who it should be this year." The students were confused because class leaders were chosen only after the first month of school and not on the first day. There was a murmur of excitement among all the toppers of

the class because it was always one among the toppers that got selected. Aarthi ma'am gave a quelling look to silence the murmur and announced, "The class leader will be Aishwarya," and smiled at me.

I was taken aback, but pleased nevertheless. I was not a naughty student nor was I the best. I was quite irritable and short-tempered for a nine-year-old. I went up to the table and donned the badge happily. Little did I know that my happiness and patience were about to be tested by Harish.

In about two weeks, I was ready to give the badge to someone else. Harish proved to be the most difficult person I had ever dealt with. After the bell rang, he would sprint out of the class and never came into the line even when I ran after him. He would try to kick classmates' desks and disturb them as they wrote in their notebooks. I started yelling even louder than the teachers to control him. A class leader was to be responsible and keep everyone in control, right?

I was convinced that I was doing my best to keep the class controlled and disciplined. I would lose my temper regularly and the teachers had started to look at the class leader instead of Harish. At least, until one incident.

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It was almost four months into my being the class leader. Fourth graders had progressed – to what felt like an achievement for a lifetime – from using pencils to pens. Harish, instead of being curious like the rest of us, had hatched the wildest plan for a nine-year-old.

On that fateful day in October, as the rains poured in Chennai with all the corridors soaking up the murky wetness, Harish found his opportune moment. He grabbed his desk-mate's pen, and as the teacher was wrapping up the lecture, fired shots of ink on the whiteboard and walls of the classroom. The class gasped and Harish gloated. I became angry at once and tears clouded my vision. Instead of yelling, I ran out of the classroom and reached Aarthi ma'am's cabin in the staff room.

"Ma'am, Harish sprayed the entire whiteboard with ink!" I panted.

Never the one to react harshly, Aarthi ma'am immediately asked me to come with her. I followed her to the classroom and found the math teacher fuming at Harish.

Aarthi ma'am asked the teacher calmly, "Is anyone hurt? Do you want help to deal with Harish?" The math teacher scolded him and Harish apologized. However, when he saw me, he made a rude gesture. I instantly fumed and cried, "Ma'am, he ruined the whiteboard and is now teasing me when he should be feeling sorry!" Several students nodded in agreement.

Aarthi ma'am's response truly baffled me. "Oh, those who agree with your class leader can go to the headmistress' office and hand Harish over to her. Aishwarya will explain the situation there as well."

"Me? I should go to the headmistress' office..." my voice was trailing away. My math teacher and Aarthi ma'am smiled. "If you believe what Harish did was wrong, I want you all to go to the headmistress and tell her about the situation," said the math teacher. "And Aishwarya stop crying and go to the headmistress and explain what happened clearly. Others follow her," Aarthi ma'am said a little more stiffly than usual.

As we huddled in the headmistress's office, it was quite a different situation there. Our headmistress looked

Illustrations: Soumya Menon



a little grim, and without looking at us said, "The naughtiest is always remembered by us teachers."

I became slightly irritated. Why was no one punishing Harish? As if sensing my thoughts, the headmistress said, "But, of course, such disruptive behaviour should not be encouraged. Harish will be punished and will sit alone for a week from today. But, I must say, this is the first time he is here this year unlike the multiple visits last year. I must say both Aarthi ma'am and Aishwarya are doing a good job. Oh yes, I heard about your harsh measures, Aishwarya, on controlling mischievous students." A couple of students agreed and my friend said, "Oh, Aishwarya is so strict with us." Another student immediately joined in, "I'm actually scared of Aishwarya."

A voice in my brain got angry. This is not how it was supposed to go. Harish was wrong, and I was getting everything right, but still my friends didn't *understand* me. The headmistress, as if sensing my thoughts again, sent the students away and asked me and Harish to go to Aarthi ma'am.

I did as I was told, but couldn't keep my emotions in anymore. I burst out to Aarthi ma'am, "How are the students angry with me when the headmistress did tell me that Harish's disturbances have reduced in class?"

Harish, however, wasn't quiet. "No, she did not say that. She said you are more strict. And, everyone made fun of you." As I was about to retort, Aarthi ma'am silenced us, "I am sure you will get a strict punishment at home, Harish. I have already called your father and you will be cleaning the ink stains off the whiteboard. Now, hurry up and do it before the next class."

Harish went away fuming.

I was alone with Aarthi ma'am, the injustice of it all ringing in my ears. I had done everything right. What more could I do? Maybe I should punish Harish said a voice in my head. Aarthi ma'am was still looking at me intently.

"Aishwarya, you're definitely doing a great job as the class leader. The notebooks are sent on time and there's much more discipline in the class. But, do you remember the last time your friends spoke to you?"

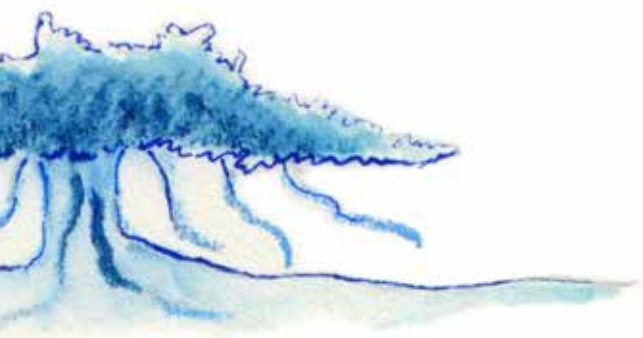
"Yes ma'am, it has been a while. I don't know. I am always angry at Harish."



"Yes, see how so few of your friends are sticking with you. Why do you think that's happening?"

"Ma'am, I don't know. I just get angry at them too. I mean, I want to be friends. But Harish..."

"Yes, Harish is annoying. But, do you see the number of people you've lost because of him? Do you see that one person has made you forget that you are actually a very capable leader? Do you see that it is your anger and frustration that Harish loves to see every time he does something mischievous?"



"So, is it my fault that Harish is behaving badly, ma'am?"

"Not at all, dear. You are a natural when it comes to maintaining discipline and punctuality. But, I wanted to give you this position to test your strengths and weaknesses. You're too young, but I see potential in your commitment to follow rules and being very organized. I don't want you to get too focused on one person or a few flaws and obsess over them. Try to be calm when some things don't go your way. In such situations when you find yourself too angry, look away at something you like."

She concluded her speech abruptly with a question. "What do you like the most in the school?"

"I really like the tree outside the school. And, I love the school when it rains, ma'am."

Aarthi ma'am smiled, "Yes, I've seen you play on the branches of the tree. Next time when you get angry, think of your tree and how it feels to swing on it. Not on the things that bother you like Harish or any other classmate of yours. Or if you get too angry, try to let it out by drawing. No, wait, you don't like art, right? Maybe try to write about it and step back from such people."

I was confused. What was this teacher saying? *Writing down anger?*

Aarthi ma'am sensed my consternation as she went on, "Next year, you are moving to a different school and leaving this city. You will be looked at differently because you will be new. Things will be different and perhaps scarier or even more irritating. In a new place, no one will know how capable Aishwarya is but they will see a rather angry child. I don't want that for you. I want the teachers in the new school to say all the good things about you. Now, the only thing I ask from you is: don't react too much to things you can't control. If you want to react, talk it out nicely, express it differently, or deflect it for a bit. Can you do that? I know you can."

Aarthi ma'am was convinced that she had persuaded me to think differently. I went back to class and heard Harish gloating. I tried to ignore him many times, but still, I lost my temper that day. I remember feeling guilty for breaking my promise to Aarthi ma'am.

But, in the next six months, things turned out to be quite different. Harish's notoriety did not stop, but it did stop the class leader from yelling. My old friends were swinging with me again on the trees of the school. I ended the year with another surprise – Class 4-A was awarded the best class in the school and their leader carried the award to the classroom. Harish let out the biggest squeal of excitement and my friends clapped the hardest.

Years have passed, but I still think of Aarthi ma'am fondly. She changed the life of someone too young to understand her advice at the time. I would think of her again as I became the Head Girl of my school in the 12th grade when I had to tackle with another 'Harish'. As this new Harish yelled at me and tried to bully me, I remember smiling at his incredulous face and walking away. Sometimes, all we need to be is calm in the face of a storm. A lesson I learned from a teacher who had every right to be angry, but proceeded to teach a lesson for a lifetime on a rather stormy day.



When parents drive teachers up the wall

Chintan Girish Modi ✍️

Being a school teacher is perhaps one of the most stressful jobs in the world today. Apart from displaying competence in terms of subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, and classroom management, teachers have to face a growing heap of unreasonable expectations from parents who send their children to school. In such a scenario, it is hard to stay calm.

Zarreen Khan, a Delhi-based author who quit her job in marketing to pursue her passion for writing, holds up a mirror to the teacher's predicament in her new book *The Fabulous Mums of Champion Valley*. It is a fast-paced and entertaining novel set in Delhi. Each chapter is written as a first-person narrative, and there are multiple narrators filling us in on the lives of third graders, their parents, and their teachers at the posh Champion Valley School.

The protagonist is a woman called Ambika who has taken up her first teaching job. She is baffled by the endless rules and regulations thrown at her, but most of all by the fact that teachers are treated as service providers and parents as customers whose demands and expectations they have to satisfy. She barely manages to stay awake during the orientation and professional development sessions meant to indoctrinate her into the school's regimented style of functioning.

At the beginning of the academic year, all class teachers are supposed to send out welcome emails to the parents of their students. Shilpa, the coordinator for the third grade, discovers that the emails sent by Ambika are not up to the mark. In order to prevent future fiascos, Shilpa shares emails sent by other teachers so that Ambika is aware of what's expected.

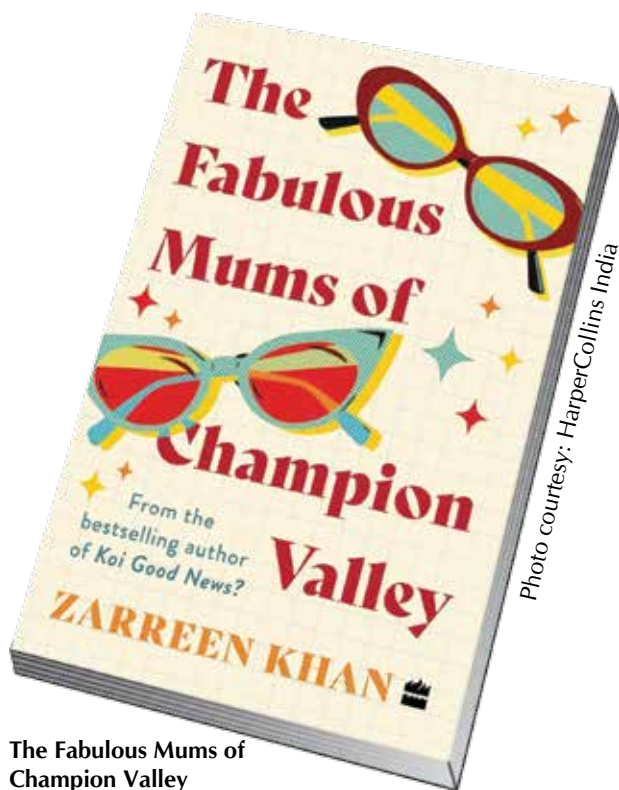
Shilpa adds, "Always start your emails with something inspiring. Or cheerful...something that makes parents feel proud to be a part of CVS...Compel them to come to school and be involved with their child's education. Motivate them, let them take ownership!" Ambika's head is spinning by this time. She is quite certain that if she were in the parent's place, she would never have made time to read such long-winded emails that read more like essays.

In the Acknowledgements section, the author claims that she did not write the book "to provide social commentary and critique" but her sharp observations are spot-on. She paints an accurate portrait of the farce that the education system has become because of the superficial add-ons to a teacher's to-do list. She also recreates the drama of parent-teacher meetings and school WhatsApp groups in colourful detail. Her sense of humour, and skilled mimicry of how parents and teachers conduct themselves, make this a page-turner.

It is challenging for teachers to maintain equanimity when they have to deal with school administrators trying to micro-manage them and parents wearing their sense of entitlement on their sleeve. She is angry that there are parents who send forgotten notebooks, water bottles, tiffin boxes, and stationery to school via app-based services like Dunzo, Swiggy, and Zomato.

Moreover, Ambika cannot keep pace with the constant flow of email correspondence. At one point, she writes a mass email to parents stating, "Please do not send five follow up emails within forty-eight hours asking

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The Fabulous Mums of Champion Valley

Author: Zarreen Khan

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Where to buy: <https://www.amazon.in/Fabulous-Mums-Champion-Valley/dp/9362135612/>

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if we've seen the email."In the same email, she adds, "Also, requesting parents who come by car for pick up to kindly collect their children on time and not send emails saying 'running late by 10 mins' and turning up 30 minutes later."

This book shows how snarky people can get when they are stressed and cannot manage their emotions. When a parent emails her to ask why a particular child did not eat her tiffin, Ambika shoots back, "Because Aanya got a broccoli parantha! Can you imagine that? I mean, getting greens in whatever way is great, but broccoli? How do you even mince broccoli?" What annoys Ambika even further is Shilpa's matter-of-fact response: "Remember, Miss Ambika. The parents are

always right...Maybe we need to schedule another training for you."

This novel will make school teachers feel seen and heard because it captures what they have to endure on a daily basis. It will also help parents recognize that being a teacher and fielding demands from the families of every student in their classroom is by no means an easy task. Some parents assume that teachers are available 24/7, and have absolutely no personal life.

In this book, when Ambika is out for a run, the parent of a child in the second grade – which Ambika does not even teach – stops her and says, "Just wanted to ask whether term break will happen as per schedule? Because we have to book tickets. To London." Ambika confesses that she has no information in this regard, and suggests writing to the school. The parent says, "But you're a class teacher." Ambika reacts, "Believe it or not, there's only so much that we know!" This parent is joined by another one, who stares at Ambika's bare legs in disgust and remarks, "She's a teacher at Champion Valley? Look at how she's dressed."

It is important to remember that this incident takes place when Ambika is not on the school campus. She has no plans of meeting her students, their parents, or her colleagues. She is aghast when she is told, "You're a teacher. You should dress more decently!" While this depiction might seem exaggerated, it is not entirely unthinkable. Parents can be judgemental.

The same can be said of teachers too. The second half of the book explores this aspect. When Ambika is utterly fed up with Shilpa's spiel on how to write impactful qualitative report cards and how to dress for the parent-teacher meetings, Ambika lets off steam by writing individualized report cards for some of the mothers that she has been observing. She has no intention of sending off these report cards but they get misplaced and are circulated widely.

The author shows how harsh and cruel teachers can be when they talk about parents. Ambika's report cards criticize their appearance, parenting skills, and their marriages. They are deeply offended and hurt by Ambika's impudence, so they take the matter to the principal. There is a big twist in the tale, and a happy ending to boot. This book is worth reading for its honesty. It is not just a laugh-riot; it also leaves one with a warm feeling in the heart and the message that we know little about people's inner struggles so we must cut them some slack.

Putting anxiety

Gita Nambiar ✍️

Learning difficulties are pervading classrooms at all levels, beginning from kindergarten to high school. While these difficulties have been around for many decades, they were overlooked by parents and teachers until now. However, today awareness has grown manifold and we are able to identify these problems in children from as early as three or four years of age. At that age, learning the alphabet, correlating sounds to letters or phonics and blending sounds can be challenging for a child with learning difficulties. Similar challenges can be seen with numeracy as well. If not identified and addressed at an early age, these difficulties get compounded and the child develops deficits in reading and writing. Older children will struggle to read, write, spell, and comprehend text. Many of them will find math equally onerous. Difficulty with paying attention, also exacerbates learning in the classroom. Poor memory, inability to organize and be responsible for their belongings, inability to follow instructions

precisely are some of the other symptoms that impact learning. As a result of these difficulties, slow learners find it hard to learn other subjects as well and their overall performance declines. The outcome of coping with these challenges is that the child is always anxious and attending school becomes an ordeal.

Anxiety is a feeling of fear or uneasiness. In the school setting, it can manifest in different ways in children. Unlike adults, children struggle to communicate their feelings, or are unable to recognize what they are feeling. It is therefore up to the adults to identify what emotions the children are experiencing. Anxiety makes some children tense and restless. This can prompt them to disturb other children around them. In some cases they are aggressive towards their peers. Others may withdraw from what is happening around them and lose themselves in a world of their own. Children who have poor coping skills may avoid going to school or make excuses to avoid school work. They lack the motivation to study.

For a child with learning difficulties, processing deficits makes classroom learning overwhelming, where they are unable to comprehend what the teacher is teaching. Due to this, the child develops a fear of tests, they realize that they are not at par with their classmates and are unable to perform as well as them. A feeling of being different from their peers can induce



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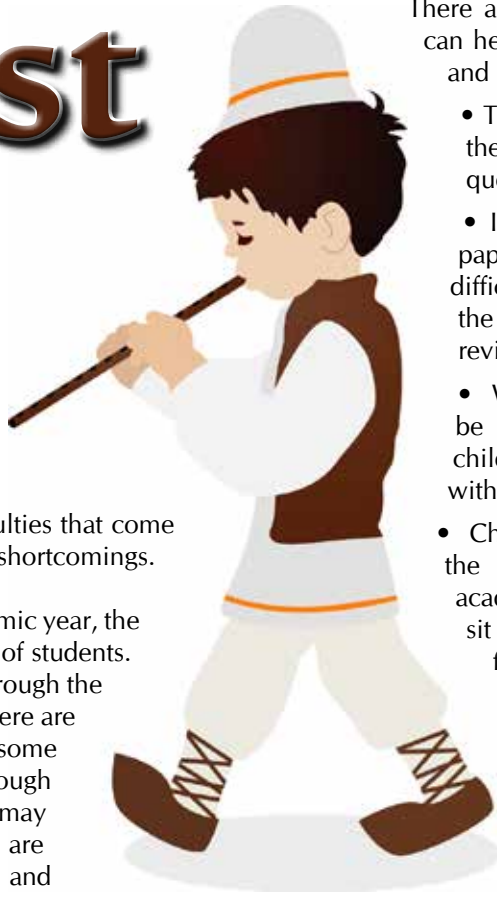
to rest

anxiety. For the same reason, such children are subjected to ridicule and bullying as well. All of this lowers their self-esteem. The child also has social and emotional difficulties that come from an awareness of their own shortcomings.

At the beginning of every academic year, the teacher welcomes a mixed bag of students. There are those who will sail through the year almost effortlessly. Then there are the average students who face some challenges, but are resilient enough to overcome the obstacles that may come their way. And there are the strugglers, who lag behind and consistently perform poorly. The teacher can identify these children fairly early in the year. However, it is the wise teacher who makes it a point to understand the reasons that lie behind their below average performance. The child could be having learning difficulties, where processing the information provided by the teacher poses challenges.

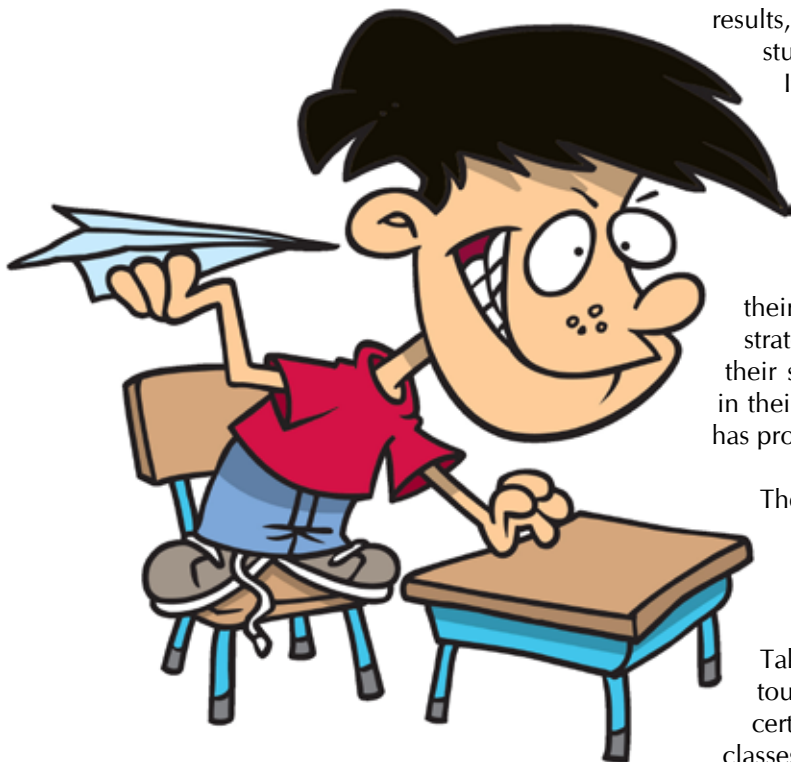
For such children, their effort does not match their outcome and there is a gap between academic potential and academic performance. The earlier these factors are identified, the easier it becomes to help the child overcome anxiety and traverse the school year with calmness and confidence.

The teacher has a crucial role to play in alleviating anxiety in students. Firstly, she needs to be aware of the prevalence of these problems among the children. I have often heard teachers complaining to parents during PTA meetings, "Your child is very distracted, he disturbs the other children. His marks are very poor; he is lazy and has to work very hard if he is to be promoted." Teachers and parents may not realize that there could be underlying reasons resulting in this kind of behaviour and performance.



There are numerous ways in which teachers can help such children overcome their fears and anxiety.

- They can make the workload easier for these children by giving them simpler questions during tests and assignments.
- In some schools, a separate question paper is prepared for children with such difficulties. If the child is unable to complete the assignment, the same questions can be reviewed in class the next day.
- While giving tests, extra time can be allotted. Even during board exams, children are given extra time or provided with a scribe to complete their exam.
- Changing the seating arrangement in the classroom could help, where the academically weaker children are made to sit closer to the teacher, preferably in the front rows, so that she can keep an eye on them and see that they are paying attention.
- To ensure that the child understands the instructions given by the teacher, she can ask them to repeat the instructions back to her and also note them down in their diary.
- Giving daily schedules helps these children maintain a set routine, which also helps in keeping them calm.
- It is not easy for the class teacher to pay individual attention to each of these children in the classroom. In such cases, she can recommend remedial intervention, where these children are pulled out of the class and are assisted by a special educator in the school.
- The teacher can sensitize the children in her class by talking to them and explaining that some children have genuine difficulty in reading and comprehension. That it is not nice to ridicule or bully them. She should encourage them to be empathetic and understanding.
- In this context, the buddy system also works well, where an academically brighter student sits with a weaker one and assists him with his studies. The latter gains confidence when they interact with someone their own age.



Embarrassment and humiliation in school, caused by peers and teachers, can also lead to emotional issues. The child may feel ineffective and stressed. In order to enhance the self-esteem of anxious children, they can be motivated to achieve mastery in other areas, like art, craft, music, sports, etc. Every child has some talent, which may not be easily discernible, so it is up to the teacher or parent to identify it and encourage them to develop it. When they do well in one of these areas of their choice, it gives a definite boost to their confidence. They feel that they can also be 'good' at something.

Children may also experience low self-esteem due to parental pressure and high expectations, particularly in the board exam years. It can cause debilitating anxiety, sometimes leading to drastic outcomes. Teachers are also under pressure to produce good

results, and hence they come down harshly on students who do not perform well in academics.

It is a difficult period for the academically weak children, and teachers would do well to be encouraging and invite them to seek their assistance in resolving their problems and clearing doubts. From my own experience with such children, talking to them in a calm and composed manner, asking about their problems and their future plans, teaching them strategies to make learning easier, help in improving their self-esteem and focusing on performing better in their examinations. For older children, journaling has proved to be effective in reducing stress.

There are instances where the symptoms of anxiety are quite severe and the teacher is unable to help the child. In such cases, the parents can be advised to seek professional help.

Taking students on fieldtrips and educational tours also help children with difficulties relax. In certain schools, teachers are allowed to conduct classes outside the classroom, perhaps under a tree or in the garden. It becomes a fun time for children and makes learning more exciting. Stepping out of the four walls of the classroom can bring down stress levels. Teaching relaxation techniques like deep breathing and yoga help children calm themselves, simultaneously improving focus and cognition. If these are done on a regular basis, it has far reaching and positive consequences.

It is heart-wrenching when your student asks you, "Ma'am, am I dumb?" One can understand the conflict and self-doubt in the child's mind. Whatever the cause, the inherent anxiety in the child comes to the surface. As teachers, if we can offer reassurance and comfort and assuage their anxiety, we have set them on the right path to achieve resilience and higher self-esteem. These children will then be equipped to face the world with a calmer and more positive approach to life.

Spicing up the everyday routine: the video games way

Aditya Deshbandhu ✍️



Images courtesy: Aditya Deshbandhu

Video games can be many things to their players from sites of storytelling and puzzle solving to safe spaces for dabbling with various cultural pursuits like music and culinary activities. They are also often a reason to form friendships and build communities as the magic from games leaks into our lives, offering us new perspectives and making sense of our realities.

However, despite the many things video games can be, sometimes they are, at their core, a great way to unwind from a long day, a moment of respite from unending to-do lists, and at times uplifters of mood. This article offers you six great games across three categories that you can play on your mobile phones on-the-go, whenever you find a minute or two for yourself.

1. **Finding patterns in the tedium:** The two games in this category are ideal for those who find joy in puzzle solving. One of the games here offers puzzles that require you to be observant and react quickly while the other needs you to change the way you perceive space and dimensions.

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- a. *Monument Valley 1 and 2*: Some of the greatest games ever made for the mobile phone, these classics are still immemorial when it comes to breaking classic modes of thinking. The puzzles here require you to not only see things differently but also challenge you to rethink basic navigational attributes like directions, rotation, and elevation. These games rely on both a player's observation and willingness to tap into the intuitive.

The second game is more explicit with the story it wishes to tell. With a very simplistic but colourful design that judiciously uses remarkably straight lines, there is a lot here to just sit back and admire as you mull possible solutions. Make sure to enjoy the hauntingly beautiful background score as you play the game. Both *Monument Valleys* are great value for money and are often on discount, but can, on rare occasions, be found for free on both iOS and Android.

- b. *Two Dots*: The successor to the iconic *Dots*, *Two Dots* does a lot of the things the original did – it allows you to match dots of the same colour for long lines, has extremely rewarding accompanying sounds, and bonuses for forming squares and rectangles. *Two Dots* tries to extend the magic further by introducing a variety of levels, an increasing variety of special dots, and unique conditions to elevate the challenge. The levels are guaranteed to fly past in this one until you begin to get stuck with the truly complex ones. A great momentary diversion that also gets you to refocus on the tasks at hand, *Two Dots* is free to play.

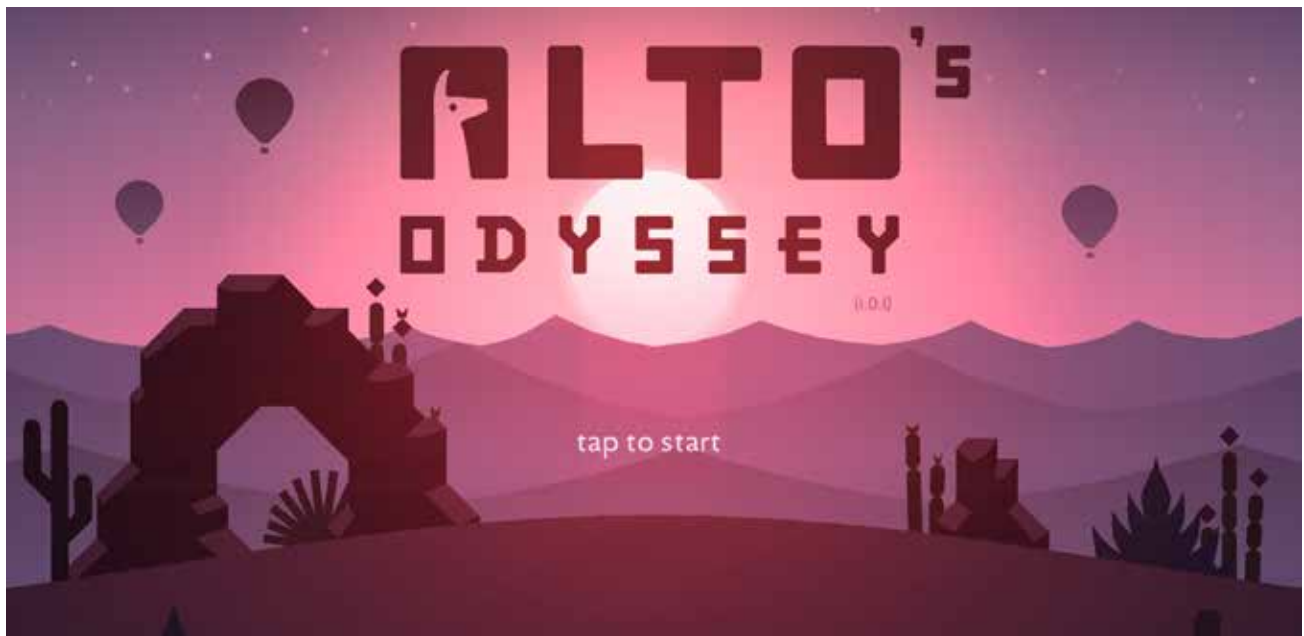
2. **Numbers, numbers all the way**: These games focus on your ability to play with numbers. While one game is all about rapid addition and your ability to perceive additive patterns, the other is card-based and uses the classic *Uno* deck in an innovative way.

- a. *2048*: Describing *2048* is rather tricky, the best thing to do is to play it and experience it firsthand. However, if one were to describe it, it is a game based on quick addition of numbers that are progressive multiples of 2 (2,4,8,16,32, 64...) with the trick being that you add two 2s to get 4 and two 4s to get 8, however you cannot add a 2 with a 4 or a 4 with an 8. This game is as much about addition as it is about the



management of space as you work your way towards the coveted 2048. My highest score over the years is 8192. *2048* is free to play and now even available on a few flights as part of their entertainment package.

- b. *Skip-Bo*: From Mattel, the makers of the classic game *Uno*, *Skip-Bo* offers a solitaire-like experience with the cards from *Uno*. The deck does not include the reverse, skip, and draw cards, and wonderfully repurposes the classic 'Wild' card to get players to clear sets of cards akin to Solitaire. Most levels have an



added twist as players are expected to also achieve additional goals apart from clearing the cards. With the classic, puzzle, and multiplayer modes and several additional new levels, this is a free-to-play game that will keep you riveted for a while.

3. **In the search for flow:** These games are less about solving puzzles and testing your mind and more about transporting yourself into a soothing reality – one where you can experience a state of flow and find the necessary calm to soothe a crazy day. The first game on this list is a scenic explorer with a unique Zen mode and the second has a strong story accompanied by some wonderful music.

a. *Alto's Adventure and Odyssey:* Two games nearly as beautiful as *Monument Valley*, these games are more about sliding/skiing across spectacular backgrounds accompanied by beautiful music. Both games, extremely popular with legions of fans, offer different kinds of experiences: the successor, *Odyssey*, also adds a unique Zen mode, where players can endlessly slide with no consequences. If clarity and peace is what you seek then the music and visual splendor on offer here can be spellbinding.

b. *Deemo and Deemo II:* These games are some of the most complex ones when it comes to recreating music. Games set around the playing of piano music and mastery of precise timing for various classical tunes, *Deemo II* is not just free-to-play but also more elaborate with a very powerful story, a wonderfully designed open world, and a fantastic flow-based experience around music playing. These could be your go-to games if you are seeking both fun and the ability to play some music. Nothing like a good tune to lighten the day, even better if you are playing the tune.

There are many more games that you can consider throughout the day depending on what you desire from your gaming pursuits. If a day-after-day challenge is what you seek, may I recommend the collection of word games from NY times – *Connections*, *Wordle*, *Spelling Bee*, *Letter Boxed*, and the just released *Strands?* Or, if you prefer gaming on social media then LinkedIn offers its own roster with *Queens*, *Pinpoint*, and *Crossclimb*. If none of these meet your palette, may I recommend some multiplayer action with the very popular *Pokémon Unite*? There is a whole world of games out there to give you an outlet before you get on to the next task on your list.

Now then, I must go! I have emails to send and some articles to draft and not to mention compile a readings list for a new course.



"Colour, colour, which colour do you want?"

Sandhya Kaura and Sunil Kaura 



Once upon a time, in the Indian classroom boards were only black, chalks mostly white (coloured chalks were a luxury and sparingly used), and the furniture only brown. Colours only came in the form of chart papers, colour pencils, sketch pens, and crayons. Today, however, classrooms are bright and colourful. What is the significance of colour in a learning environment? Do colours have an impact on our mood and how we learn? If yes, how do we choose colours for our classrooms?

The physics behind the impact

Research suggests that colours have an impact on our mental and emotional state. Colour is not just a visual experience, it is an electro-magnetic energy. It has a wavelength that can impact us physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. In the rainbow colour spectrum, the wavelength is shortest for violet and it keeps increasing as we reach red. The colours with shorter wavelengths are more calming and relaxing.

Sandhya Kaura and **Sunil Kaura** are *eco-entrepreneurs* also known as the 'Wellness Couple' amongst their family and friends. Sandhya has been a psychological counsellor and runs a business initiative 'EcoPrakriti' manufacturing 100% natural homecare and personal care products. Sunil used to be a chartered accountant but now facilitates inner wellness using his signature 'Alpha Healing Meditations' through an online app called **Spoorthi Wellness**. They can be reached at <sanramchandani@gmail.com>; <sunil.kaura@spoorthi.info>.

Spirituality behind the choice of colours

When you look at the seven chakras (or energy centres of the human body) and the colours associated with them, the higher intelligences are represented by,

- Violet (Crown Chakra)
- Indigo (Third Eye Chakra)
- Blue (Throat Chakra)
- Green (Heart Chakra)

So, these colours can be used to connect with and enhance the intellectual abilities of a person.

Now, the interesting question...

What colours do we use in schools?

This depends on your goal or purpose.

- Where are you using the colour?
- Is it to energize or calm down?
- Is it to stimulate the senses?
- Is it to facilitate a focused activity?

Beige/Brown

The colour of earth, soil, tree trunks, jute, cane.

It gives a sense of assurance, strength, stability and warmth.

It can release ambiguity, stress, tension, anxiety. It can also provide a neutral background for play of light and colour or accents.

Most schools or educational institutions today focus on the holistic development of the child. In addition to academic learning, there is a lot of focus on co-curricular activities, such as art and craft, drama, sports, yoga and meditation, dance, music, physical training, etc.

Each of these activities is conducted in a different space in the school. So, these spaces have to be designed to cater to the specific requirements of these activities.

For example, dance is a high intensity physical activity. Therefore, we need to use stimulating colours. Similarly, drama and music require the creative juices

White

The most accepting colour, it lets every colour just be ITSELF. In its physical composition, it is the mix of all the seven colours of the rainbow. It reflects all light.

It can promote creativity and provide a clear background.

Red

The colour of fire, love, passion, blood. It symbolizes energy, alertness, and danger. It is very stimulating bordering over disturbing if used too much.

to flow and the right choice of colours can aid the process.

In classrooms, one needs to focus on learning. Using calming colours can aid this process.

Calming colours

Violet, indigo, blue, and green

These colours have a calming effect. Our minds slow down. The more our minds slow down, the fewer thoughts we have per second. This helps us be present in the moment and focus better on the task at hand. This not only enhances learning, but also helps retain what we have learnt. We could use these lovely colours to design classrooms.

Stimulating colours

Neon green, yellow, orange, red

As much as calming colours are important in our lives, so are stimulating colours. These colours have a vibrant energy that brighten up our mood. Stimulating colours propel us into action. So it is beneficial to use these colours while designing spaces that require high energy and action. Designing the dance room, zumba room, karate room, taekwondo room, etc., with shades of yellow and orange with a hint of red, can help energize us when we are doing these activities.

Creative colours

Green

Shades of green can be very useful to enhance creativity. So, we can use green in the arts and crafts room, theatre room, music room, etc.

Green

The colour of plants, life, growth, creative force of Mother Nature, harmony. It brings about creativity, a sense of tranquillity, peace, wellbeing, reduces fatigue/stress.

It can help focus, relax, concentrate.

Meditation colours

Purple, lilac, pink, etc.

These colours help a person reach a deeper state of

Orange

A Vibrant, friendly colour that is a reminder of refreshing, energizing juicy oranges.

It is a good choice for activities that require more physical movement, stimulation, and engagement.

relaxation. Thoughtful additions and subtractions to a space can make a room useful for multiple purposes, changing the entire mood/tempo of the space.

You can lay down violet/indigo coloured cushions/ mats if you are meditating. In this deeper state of consciousness, our thoughts and emotions heal. While brightly coloured yoga mats (red/orange/yellow) can add vibrancy and energy to the space.

How can we design our classrooms?

We can create separate nooks and corners/spaces in our classroom. For example, we have separate spaces for different activities at home – the dining room, bedroom, bathroom, living room.

Similarly, in our classrooms, we can create different spaces for different activities, such as the story corner, activity corner, drama corner, circle-time space, and learning corner.

Yellow

The colour of sun, a clean source of light and energy.

It brings along a feeling of joy, happiness, energy.

It can also be tiring if used too much.

Violet can be used in the learning corner, while the activity corner can have shades of blue. Use green to design the drama corner. These colours can be integrated in the different corners in multiple ways – wall colour, wall paints, chart paper, boards, carpets, rugs, cushions, etc.

Purple/Lilac

The colour of lilac flowers; a lovely mix of blue with little red. It brings along a feeling of freshness, joy, happiness, and tranquillity. It also connotes spirituality to many.

An ideal colour for meditation, tapping into intuition, creativity.

Plants and greenery

You can also bring the classroom to life by placing indoor plants in different corners. Indoor plants like monstera, ZZ plant, snake plant, money plant, etc. add life to the classroom. These plants can be easily maintained.

Plants not only provide more oxygen, but also make us feel more peaceful and connected. Children are less cranky and exhibit serenity. This peace and tranquillity of the plants brings in more stability in the classroom. Children are able to focus better and hence learn better.

Black

The colour of darkness, ignorance, sophistication. It is neutral and absorbing. It conceals all flaws.

It stands for mourning in some cultures. A liberal use of it can make the space or reader feel dull, dark, fatigued, low in energy.

Conclusion

Armed with this deeper understanding of colours, let's:

- Create environments and spaces that foster a holistic development of children.
- Channelize their energies constructively.
- Facilitate children to process their emotions and develop greater self-awareness.
- Intelligently navigate through the ups and downs that life presents.

Blue

The colour of ice, sky, water, ink.

It instills a feeling of calmness, stillness, serenity, night, freedom, loyalty, reliability, trust. It has the unique power to soothe the soul. Ideal for activities that require concentration.



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